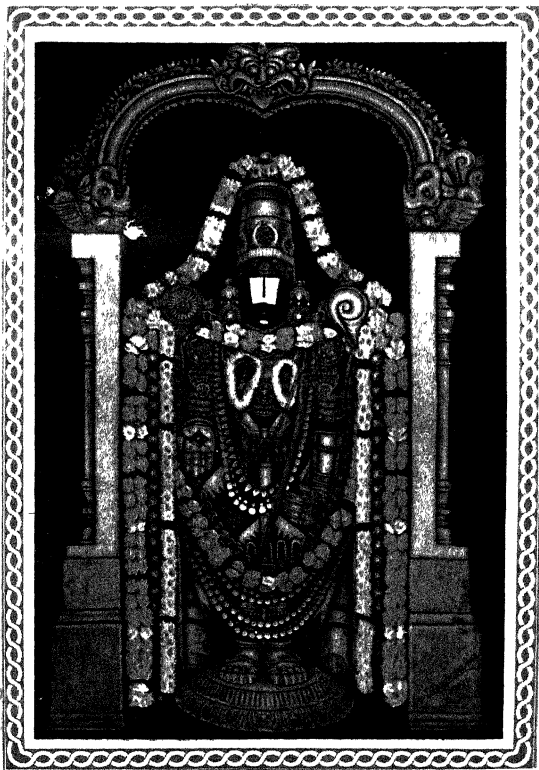


108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME THREE

Miss M.S. Ramesh, I.A.S.



TIRUMALA TIRUPATI DEVASTHANAMS

TIRUPATI

1995

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VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS

VOLUME THREE

DIVYA DESAMS IN CHOLA NADU

Miss M.S. RAMESH, I.A.S.



Published by

Sri N. RAMESH KUMAR, I.A.S.

Executive Officer

T.T. DEVASTHANAMS

TIRUPATI

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108 VAISHNAVITE DIVYA DESAMS VOLUME III

By

Miss M.S. RAMESH, I.A.S.

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FOREWORD

It is our belief that the Omnipotent out of His infinite and boundless love manifests himself in sacred places of worship to give his bountiful Divine Grace.

The Alwars through divine vision and inspiration have sung in praise of the 108 Divya Kshetrams. Visiting and praying at these Divya Kshetrams where the Lord is ever present and to receive His Divine grace is a wish dearly cherished by the believers.

Of the 108 Divya Kshetrams, Tirumala or Tiruvengadam is one of the foremost being a Swayamvyakta Divya Kshetram. In the Kaliyuga Lord Venkatachalapati showers his potent and choicest blessings and grace to those offering worship to his Lotus feet. He is the Kaliyuganatha.

In the present volume Miss M.S. Ramesh, gives an account of the Holy temples of Chola Nadu. This is a worthy sequel to the earlier volumes on sacred shrines in Tonda Nadu and Chola Nadu.

What stands out in the work of the author is her total commitment and involvement in her monumental efforts for the benefit of His devotees. Such an effort could only be divinely inspired.

We are extremely happy to bring out the present volume and it is our fond hope that the readers find this as an extremely useful work especially in their endeavours in conducting Holy pilgrimage to the Divya Desams.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER,

T.T. Devasthanams.

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**Dedicated
To my Parents
Smt. Padmavathy Srirama Iyengar
and
Prof. Srirama Iyengar**

PREFACE

This is the third volume in the series on the "108 Vaishnavite Divyadesams". In Volume I, I had dealt with the 22 vaishnavite divyadesams in Thondai Nadu extending over the old Chengelpet and Madras Revenue Districts in Tamil Nadu. Volume II dealt with 21 of the 40 divyadesams in Chola Nadu covering Tanjore and Trichy Revenue Districts in Tamil Nadu. In this volume, the balance of 19 divya desams in Chola Nadu and 2 divyadesams in Nadu Nadu i.e. South Arcot District in Tamil Nadu are covered.

The presentation is the same as in the earlier volumes. For each divya desam, the mythological, epigraphical highlights are presented, followed by the presentation of select mangalasaana hymns from the Naalaayira Divyaprabandhas. In some cases, I have also given select songs composed by the Musical Trinity in praise of the Lord of the divyadesam.

Needless to add that, as in the earlier volumes, I have received unstinted co-operation from many of my friends and colleagues. I wish to publicly acknowledge my grateful thanks to them. First and foremost, as usual, my family members fully participated and involved themselves in this task by not only collecting material, but also going through my drafts and making suitable suggestions and alterations. The affectionate encouragement that I received from them has been a motivating factor for me to proceed with this tough task of assembling relevant materials for all the vaishnavite divya desams. I am therefore grateful to God for the continued moral and physical support that I received from my family members.

Many of my colleagues have extended to me their willing support and co-operation by collecting the sthala puranas from the respective devasthanams. They collected published as well as unpublished material and very often went to the extent of meeting the seniormost priests in the temple and recording on cassette their account of the peculiar features of those temples. In this context, I would like to specially mention the help extended so cheerfully and willingly by my col-

leagues Tvl.R.Chandrakanthan, Thiru A.Ramanujam and Thiru K.Bhakthavatchalam. Thiru Chandrakanthan took a lot of interest and collected not only the written material, but also personally took photographs of the various temple towers and the utsavamurthis of the divyadesams covered in this volume. I am happy that thanks to him I have been able to visit all the divyadesams in Chola Nadu. As is well known, there are 4000 pasurams in the Divyaprabandas. Selection of the relevant pasuram for each divyadesam was ably done by Sri Sthalasayanathuraivar Swamigal. He ensured that I understood the meaning of the pasuram in simple Tamil first so that in turn I could convey its meaning in English in the correct fashion. The link between Sri Sthalasayanathuraivar Swamigal and me was Thiru Ramanujan. I sincerely believe that it was only through God's grace that I was able to get the cheerful, affectionate and wholehearted support from these colleagues of mine.

My thanks are also due to Thiru K.Ramji, who, not only gave me perfect secretarial assistance, but because of his innate religious aptitude had a participative pleasure in dealing with the subject. It was a pleasure to dictate the drafts to him. He and Thiru N.Muthukrishnan have been such efficient perfect stenographers and they so willingly and cheerfully typed out all the material, the excellent support extended by them made my task easy.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not publicly acknowledge my continued grateful thanks to Mr.V.N.Srinivasan who took complete responsibility for writing the relevant pasurams in Tamil in the hymnology sections and also writing the stotrams in Sanskrit. As a devout vaishnavite himself, I found that he completely identified himself with the task on hand.

In this volume, I had decided to write on the panchayudhams of Maha Vishnu as the general chapter preceding the chapters on the specific divyadesams. I would not have been able to write this chapter but for the committed involvement and support extended by my sister Dr.Lakshmi Kumari and our family friend Dr. T.V.Subramanian. The two of them gave me a wealth of material on the panchayudhams that I felt thor-

oughly educated in the subject after going through the books and literature given by them. My special thanks are also due to Sri Sthalasayanathuraivar Swamigal who, as stated earlier, extended to me his scholarly assistance in selecting the specific mangalasasana pasuras and also explaining to me its meaning. My grateful thanks are also due to Thiru M.N.Krishnaswamy, the publisher of Ramanujavani who whenever I approached him on any matter say be it for selecting photos or finding out the correct meaning of specific words was ever willing to help me out. I would also like to place on record my special thanks to Dr.R.Ananthan, Professor and Head of the Department of English, Vivekananda College, Madras, who read through all my drafts with an eagle eye so as to ensure that the English was good. My special thanks are also due to Prof. Narasimhachari, Professor & Head of the Department, Department of Vaishnavism, University of Madras. I am grateful to him for helping me in writing the chapter on the Ayudhams of Maha Vishnu by making available books on the Ayudhams.

With this volume, I have completed 64 of the 108 divya desams. I hope and pray I will have the continued support and grace of Lord of Seven Hills in completing the balance of the work relating to 44 divya desams.

OM NAMO NARAYANA

SRIMATE RAMANUJAYA NAMAHA

Anugraha Srimukham

Sriman Narayana is the mother and father of all in the universe. "One can obtain all desired good things by surrendering unto Him" says saint Markandeya. Jivas (Souls) may be classified into three categories as (i) Baddhas (souls in bondage), (ii) Muktas (souls released from bondage) and (iii) Nityasuris (souls who are eternally free). The Nityasuris are those who enjoy the bliss of the company of the Lord and do *kainkaryam* to Bhagavan from time immemorial. The Muktas are those who, after getting released from bondage which is due to their karma, reach Paramapada and enjoy the bliss of the company of the Lord like the Nityasuris. All of us are Baddhas. We are suffering by being caught up in the whirling wheel of Samsara (Cycles of births and deaths) to which we are bound by the rope in the form of our good and bad deeds done in innumerable previous births. In order to get release from such a bondage, we must do either Bhakti yoga or Prapatti (unconditional complete surrender of the self) to Lord Almighty. The Lord has taken incarnations as Para, Vyuha, Vibhava, Antaryami (or Harda) and Archa only to help us in adopting either of these means of attaining Moksha.

A person who is afflicted with thirst must drink water. Will the water available in plenty on the outer cover of the brahmada be useful to quench his thirst? Is it possible to go there? No. similarly Vasudeva in Paramapadam would be useful only to the Nityasuris and Muktas but not to us.

Let us not bother about the water available in the outer cover of the brahmada. The Milky ocean (Thirupparkadal) is available well within the outer cover of the brahmada. Nectarlike milk overflows the shore of the Milky-ocean. If we drink that milk, it would not only quench our thirst but also would nourish and strengthen our body. Is it possible to go there? No. The Lord residing over the Milky-Ocean and the Vyuha form like Kesava etc. would be useful only to the Devas but not at all to us who are human beings.

Let us not think of the Milky-ocean. Suppose that there is a wild river (called Kattaru in Tamil) nearby. Is it possible to drink water from the wild river? It is not possible because, the water from the clouds that crowd together under the influence of stormy winds would flow in the wild river only for a few days. Will that water be available to us whenever we are thirsty? No. That water flows only for two or three days and reaches the ocean quickly. Thus the Vibhava Avatharas of the Lord would not be useful to us at anytime we desire. Water will be available in the wild river only during the time of rains and that too only to the people living nearby. Similarly, the Vibhava Avatharas of the Lord as SRI RAMA, SRI KRISHNA etc. were accessible only to those who lived in Their times (i.e., in those Yugas) but not to us who are living in the Kaliyuga.

Even though water ceases to flow in the wild river when the rain ceases, potable water as sweet as coconut water could be obtained by digging a deep pit (called ootru in Tamil) in the sand bed of the wild river. We can quench our thirst with the water obtained from such pits. However, this is not an easy process. Why? The sand that falls back into the pit while digging should be removed again. The water that streams out first would be contaminated with the dirt in the soil. One must pump out that water until it becomes clear and clean. Good water will stream out only when all the dirty water in the pit is removed. During the process of making the water clean, we not only get tired but also our thirst doubles. Similarly, even though the Antaryami Avatara takes place in our heart, we cannot easily attain Him. To realise the Antaryami form, we must first do Karmayoga, followed by Jnana Yoga. Just as dirt comes along with the water when the pit is dug, so too dirt arises in our minds in the form of lust, anger, miserliness, ignorance, arrogance, envy etc. while doing these yogas. We must first cleanse our minds from these dirt and for this enormous effort must be put forth through proper control of the mind. Only great saints who have completely given up all desires can achieve this. Hence, it is extremely difficult to realise God in our hearts and carry out Bhakti Yoga or Prapatti for eradicating our sins completely.

Even in summer when water becomes scarce, water remains in the deep depressions (called Madu in Tamil). A thirsty person can go there and drink the water to his satisfaction and quench his thirst. Archavatara is like water in a Madu. The Lord in the form of Archavatara resides in the temples of Sri Vaishnavites. The Archa Vighraha is made up of an alloy of five metals and has the form and beauty necessary to act as feast to our eyes. When consecrated by the brahmins through Vedic Mantras, Para Vasudeva residing in the Paramapadam also enters these idols with all His glory and power and with a body made of Suddha-satva. Since the archakas install Him daily through Vedic mantras and worship Him, He resides in the idols with all His glory and bestows the boons sought by the devotees. He also speaks to the devotees who surrender solely unto Him and worship Him with unalloyed devotion. Though the Lord in the form of Archa resides in the temples at the various places, those places which were venerated and worshipped by the Alvars through their devotional songs - (pasurams) are called Divyadesams which are 108 in number.

The Alvars enjoyed the Archavataras in these Divyadesams due to their deep devotion. Nammalvar stayed at the foot of the everawake (non- sleeping) tamarind tree at Alvar-thirunagari, had the darshan of the Lords in the various Divyadesams by surrendering unto them through unalloyed devotion and sang in praise of those Archavataras.

Thirumangai Alvar had the fortune of getting initiated into the Ashtakshara Mantra by the Lord Himself. He travelled to various Divyadesams and sang in praise of the Lord there. Thirumangai Alvar out of deep love for the Lord, assumed woman-hood (in his thought), became attracted by the beauty and auspicious qualities of the Lord and sang in praise of Him with his heart melting with love of Nayika towards the Lord as Nayaka.

Thondaradipodi Alvar says in Thirumaalai: "Oh Lord Ranganatha! I prefer the pleasure of serving you here to that of going to Paramapada and governing it". Thus he considers the service to Lord Renganatha to be more pleasurable than reaching

Paramapada and experiencing Brahmananda. Swamy Vedanta Desika, a great Srivaishnavite Acharya, says, out of deep devotion to Lord Vardaraja of Kancheepuram, "I do not desire even the life in Srivaikunta since I have the fortune of constantly seeing Your (varadaraja's) enchanting form".

Just as clouds extract pure water from the salty water of the ocean and pours it as rain for the benefit of all, so too the Alvars have helped the humanity by propagating the ideas of the Tatva, Upaya (the means for attaining Moksha) and Purushartha (loving service to the Lord) contained in the four Vedas in easy and lucid Tamil so that even ordinary people may get Moksha by serving the Lord in the form of Archavatara.

The present publication contains the history of a few more Divyadesams in English, a world language, for the benefit of all the people. This is really a praise-worthy effort since it is the outcome of the noble aim that we people should enjoy the bliss of Moksha after destroying all our Karma of the present and previous births by surrendering unto the Lord in the form of Archavatara in Divyadesams. The greatness of the aim of the author is consistent with the dictum "Let the world enjoy the same bliss as I had"

The present work is worthy to be read and enjoyed by all. The excellent colour photographs of the Lord as well as the gigantic temple towers included in this book help us to enjoy the glory of the Lord like the Alvars who sing "We had the darshan of the Lord! We had the darshan of the Lord! A great treat to our eyes indeed!".

In this series of volumes, the first contains the history of 22 Divyadesams of Thondainadu and the second 21 Divyadesams of Cholanadu. The third volume contains the history of 21 Divyadesams (19 belonging to Cholanadu and 2 of Nadunadu). We are glad to know that in three more volumes the history of the remaining Divyadesams would be completed.

Srivaishnavachelvi Ms M.S.Ramesh, I.A.S. is doing this commendable Kainkaryam (Service to the Lord) through several years of enormous efforts. This work is akin to adding sweet

fragrance to a golden lotus, since the author is collecting and publishing correct information regarding the Divyadesams after actually going to each and every Divyadesam in person, worshipping the Lord there and receiving the blessings of the Lord as well as His consort. Is there any doubt that the community of astikas would whole-heartedly welcome as well as commend such a priase-worthy Kainkaryam? We contemplate on Sriman Narayan and pray to the Divine Couple of Srirangam and Lord Srinivasa of Thirupati and bless the author Ms. M.S.Ramesh, I.A.S. to have a long and healthy life, the enthusiasm needed to publish the remaining volumes and a very happy life of fulfilment of all her desires. We also similarly bless the officials of Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams who helped the author to publish this work in good quality paper in a commendable way.

Place: Srirangam

Date : 23.2.94.

Narayana Narayana

(Sd/-) Anantha Narasimhachar

Sri Karyam

Srimad Andavan Poundareekapuram

Swamy Asramam

43-A/13, Asramam Road, Srirangam.

அநுக்ரஹ ஸ்ரீமுகம்.

உலகினர் அனைவருக்கும் தாயும் தந்தையுமாக இருப்பவர் ஸ்ரீமந்நாராயணன். அவனைச் சரணடைந்தால் எல்லா நன்மைகளையும் பெறலாம் என்பர் மார்க்கண்டேய முனிவர். ஜீவர்கள் மூவகைப்படுவர். பத்தர், முக்தர் நித்யர் என்று. ஸ்ரீவைகுண்டத்தில் எப்பொழுதுமே பகவத் கைங்கர்யத்தைச் செய்து கொண்டு ப்ரஹ்மானந்தத்தை அனுபவித்துக் கொண்டிருப்பவர் நித்யர். கர்ம பாசங்களினின்றும் விடுபட்டுப் பரமபதம் சென்று நித்யர்களைப்போன்று ஆனந்தித்திருப்பவர் முக்தர். நாம் அனைவரும் பத்தர்கள். கணக்கின்றி எடுத்த பல்வகைப் பிறவிகளில் செய்த தீய, நல்ல செயல்களினால் ஈட்டிய பாப புன்யங்களாகிய வினைகளாம் பாசத்தினால் கட்டுண்டு பிறப்பு, இறப்பு ஆகிய சக்கரத்தின் சுழற்சியில் அகப்பட்டு அல்லதுறுகிறோம். இப்பாசங்களினின்றும் விடுபடப் பரமனைக் குறித்து பக்தி அல்லது ப்ரபத்தி எனும் உபாயங்களைச் செய்ய வேண்டும். இவற்றில் நம்மை ஈடுபடுத்துவதற்காகவே எம்பெருமான் பர, வ்யூஹ, விபவ, ஹார்த, அர்ச்சா எனப்படும் அவதாரங்களை எடுக்கிறான்.

தாஹத்தினால் தவிப்பவனுக்கு உடனே தண்ணீரைப் பருக வேண்டும். அவனுக்கு அண்டத்தின் முகட்டில் நிறையச் சூழ்ந்திருக்கும் ஆவரண ஜலத்தைக் காட்டினால் பயன்படுமா? அங்கேயார் செல்வது? அதுபோல் எம்பெருமானின் பரவாஸு தேவரூபம் நித்யர்கட்கும் முக்தர்கட்கும் பயன்படுமே ஒழிய நமக்குப் பயன்படாது. ஆவரண ஜலம் வேண்டாம். அதற்குக் கீழே திருப்பாற்கடல் இருக்கிறது. கல்விச் சொட்டுப்போல் பால் நிரம்பி வழிகிறது. அதைப் பருகினால் தாஹமும் அடங்கும். உடலுக்கும் புஷ்டியை (வலிமையை) அளிக்கும் என்றால் அங்கும் தான் நம்மால் போக முடியுமா? முடியாது. அதுபோல கூராப்திநாதன், கேசவன் முதலிய வ்யூஹ அவதாரங்கள் தேவர்கட்குப் பயன்படுமேயொழிய மானிடரான

நமக்குச் சிறிதும் பயன்படாது. அதுபோகட்டும். அருகிலே காட்டாறு, அங்கு சென்று நிறைய நீரைப் பருகலாம் எனாலு அதுவும் இப்பொழுது நமக்குபயன்படாது என? பெரும் புயற்காற்று வீசும் பொழுது திரண்டுவரும் மேகங்களை கொட்டிய மழைநீர் அதில் சின்னாட்கள் தான் ஓடும். அந்த நீர் நமக்குத் தாஹம் ஏற்படும் போதெல்லாம் பருகுவதற்கு கிடைக்குமா? கிடைக்காது. அதிலு வரும் நீர் விரைந்து ஓடி இரண்டு மூன்று நாட்களில் கடலில் சேர்ந்து விடும். இக்காட்டாற்று நீர் போல் பரமன் எடுக்கும் தகாவதார விபவரூபங்கள் எக்காலத்தும் நமக்குப் பயன்படாது. காட்டாற்று நீர் பெருமழை பொழியும் காலத்தில் அதன் அருகில் வசிப்பர்கட்குத் தான் பயன்படும். அதுபோல ராம, கிருஷ்ணாதி விபவ அவதாரங்கள் அவ்வோயுகங்களில் வாழ்ந்தவர்கட்குத் தான் பயன்படுமேயொழிய கலியுகத்தினரான நமக்குப் பயன்படாது.

மழை ஓய்ந்தபொழுது காட்டாற்றில் தண்ணீர் ஓடாவிட்டாலும் நீர் ஓடிய மணற் திட்டுகளில் தோண்டினால் இளநீர் போன்ற தெள்ளிய பருகுநீர் கிடைக்குமே! அங்கு சென்று ஊற்றுக்களைத் தோண்டியதும் கிடைக்கும் நீரைப் பருகி தாகத்தைப் போக்கிக் கொள்ளலாமே எனில் அதுவும் நமக்கு எளிதில் கிடைக்காது. ஏன்? ஊற்று தோண்டும் பொழுது அதில் சரிந்துவரும் மணலை அப்புறப்படுத்த வேண்டும். ஊறும் நீர் பூமியிலுள்ள மூக்குகளை ஒருங்கே திரட்டிக்கொண்டு வரும். அம்மாசுகள் டீரும் வரை மீண்டும் மீண்டும் இறைக்க வேண்டும். இறைக்க இறைக்க கடைசியில் தூயநீர் ஊறும். அது கிடைப்பதற்குள் நம் உடல் ஓய்ந்து விடுவதோடு நம்தாகமும் இரட்டிப்பாகி விடும். அதுபோல அந்தர்யாமி அவதாரம் நம் இதயத்திலேயே ஏற்பட்டாலும், அவ்வெம்பெருமானை நாம் எளிதில் கண்டு உபாயத்தை அனுஷ்டித்துப் பிறகு ஞான யோகத்தைச் செய்ய வேண்டும். ஊற்று தோண்டும் போது மாசுகள் வருவது போல் நம் மனத்தில் தோன்றும் காமம், கோபம், லோபம், மோஹம், மதம், மாத்ஸர்யம் ஆகிய மனத்திலுள்ள மலங்களை போக்கிக்கொள்ள வேண்டும். மனதை அடக்கி இவற்றை அகற்றப் பெருமுயற்சி தேவை. இதை முற்றும் துறந்த மஹர்ஷிகளால் தான் செய்ய முடியும். எனவே நம் இதயத்திலுள்ள அந்தர்யாமியை ஸாக்ஷாத்கரித்து பக்தி அல்லது ப்ரபத்தி உபாயத்தைச் செய்து நம் தீவினைகளைப் போக்கிக் கொள்வது மிகக் கடினம்.

கோடையில் எங்கும் தண்ணீர் வற்றினாலும் ஆறுகளிலுள்ள மடுக்களில் ஆழமாக தண்ணீர் தேங்கி நிற்கும். தாகமுள்ளவன் அங்கு சென்று நிறையத தண்ணீரைப் பருகி தாஹத்தைப் போக்கிக் கொள்ளலாம். இத்தகு மடு போன்றது அர்ச்சாவதாரம். இந்த அர்ச்சாவதாரத்து எம்பெருமான் ஸ்ரீவைஷ்ணக் கோயில்கள் தோறும் ஸேவை ஸாதிக்கிறான். இவன் ஐம்பொன்னாலான விக்ரஹ (மூர்த்தி) வடிவில் இருப்பவன். நம் கண்களைக் கவரும் உருவ அமைப்பும் அழகும் ஒருங்கே அமைந்தவன். ஸ்ரீவைகுண்டத்திலுள்ள பரவாஸுதேவனே அந்தணர்கள் ஒதும் வேதமந்த்ரங்களினால் தனது அப்ராஹ்மமான திவ்ய திருமேனியோடு ஐம்பொன் பதுமைகளில் புகுந்து நித்யவாஸம் பண்ணுகிறான். அர்ச்சகர்கள் தினந்தோறும் வேதமந்திரங்களினால் எம்பெருமானை ஆவாஹனம் செய்து ஆராதிப்பதால் மிகப்பொலிவுடன் விளங்குவதோடு பக்தர்கள் வேண்டும் பயனை நல்குகிறான். இவன் தன்னையே அடைக்கலமாகக் கொண்டு வழிபடும் பக்தர்களோடு பேசுவதும் உண்டு. அர்ச்சாவதார எம்பெருமான் பல இடங்களில் கோயில் கொண்டு எழுந்தருளியிருந்தாலும் ஆழ்வார்களால் மங்களாசாஸனம் பெற்ற (இன்னிசைப்பாக்களால் பாடித் துதிக்கப்பெற்ற) திருத்தலங்கள் திவ்யதேசங்கள் என்பர். இவை நூற்றெட்டு.

இத் திவ்யதேசத்து எம்பெருமான்களிடம் ஆழங்காற்பட்டு அனுபவித்தவர்கள் ஆழ்வார்கள். நம்மாழ்வார் திவ்யதேசத்து எம்பெருமான்களைப் ப்ரபத்தியினால் பக்திமிருந்த நிலையில் நாம் எழுந்தருளியிருந்த உறங்காப்புளியின் அடிவாரத்தில் இருந்தபடியே ஸேவித்து மங்களாசாஸனம் பண்ணினார்.

திருங்கையாழ்வாரோ எம்பெருமானிடம் எம்பெருமானிடம் நேரிலேயே அஷ்டாக்ஷரமந்த்ரோபதேசம் பெற்றவர். அவரோ திவ்யதேசங்களுக்கு எழுந்தருளி மங்களாசாஸனம் பண்ணியவர். நம்மாழ்வாரைப் போல கவியனும் உள்ளடங்காத அன்பினால் பெண்மையை ஏற்றுப் பரமசிவன் அழகிலும், குணங்களிலும், ஈடுபட்டுக் காதல்கொண்டு பரமனை நாயகனாகவும் தன்னை நாயகியாகவும் பாவித்துக் கசிந்து உருகிப்பாடினார். தொண்டரடிப் பொடியாழ்வார் “இச்சுவை தவிர யான் போய் இந்திரலோகம் ஆளும் அச்சுவை பெறினும் வேண்டேன் அரங்கமாநகருளானே” என்று பரமபதம் சென்று ப்ரஹ்மானந்தத்தை அனுபவிப்பதை

விட திருவரங்களுக்குத் தொண்டு செய்து அனுபவிப்பதையே பேரானந்தமாகக் கருதினார். ஸ்ரீவைஷ்ணவ ஆசார்யரான ஸ்வாமி தேவிகளும் காஞ்சிவரதராஜனிடம் உள்ள பகதியினால் “வைகுண்டவாஸோபி நமே அபிலாஷை” ஸ்ரீவைகுண்டத்தில் எனக்கு ஆசையில்லை என்றார்.

மேகங்கள் கடலின உப்பு நீரைத்தாம் பருகி அனைவரும் பருகி வாழ்வதற்கேற்ற நன்னீராக மாற்றி மழையாகப் பொழிவது போல் ஆழ்வார்கள் பாமர மக்களும் அரசாசுவராதத்தில் ஈடுபட்டு உய்யவேண்டி நானமறைகளிலும் உள்ள தத்துவ, உபாய புருஷாரத்தங்களை நன்கு அறியும்படி எளிய சந்தமிகு பாலேய் தமிழில் நாலாயிரப் பிரபந்த உருவில் வெளியிட்டு உதவியிருக்கிறார்கள்.

இவ்வாறு ஆழ்வார்களும் ஆசார்யர்களும் காட்டிக் கொடுத்த அரசாருபமான திவ்யதேசத்து எம்பெருமானிடம் சரணடைந்து முற்பிறவிகளிலும், இப்பிறவிகளிலும் செய்த வினைகளைத் தொலைத்துப் பேரின்பப் பேற்றை நாம் பெறக் கருதி “யாதும் ஊரே யாரும் கேளிர்” எனும் முதுமொழிக்கு இணங்க அனைத்துலகினரும் உய்யும் வகையில் “யான பெற்ற பேறு இவ்வையகம் பெறுக” எனும் பெருநோக்கோடு உலகமொழியாம் ஆங்கிலத்தில் நூற்றெட்டுத்திருப்பதிகளின் சரித்திரத்தை (இது காறும் ஒருசேர வெளிவராததை) இந்நூலில் தொகுத்து அளித்தது மிகவும் பாராட்டுக்குரியது. இத்தொகுப்பு அனைவரும் வாசித்தும் கேட்டும் மகிழ்வதற்குரியது. சரித்திரம் மட்டுமின்றி திவ்யதேசத்து எம்பெருமானின் கவர்ச்சிமிக்க அழகிய படங்களுக்கும், திருக்கோயில்களின் வானளாவிய கோபுரங்களின் படங்களுக்கும் வெளியிட்டிருப்பது அனைவரும் வணங்கி வழிபட்டு “கண்டோம் கண்டோம் கண்ணுக்கினியன கண்டோம்” என ஆழ்வார்போன்று கண்களாகக் கண்டு களித்து மகிழ உதவுகிறது.

இந்நூலில் முதல் பாகத்தில் தொண்டை நாட்டின் 22 திவ்ய தேசங்களும், இரண்டாம் பாகத்தில் சோழநாட்டின் 21 திருப்பதிகளிலும் இடம்பெற்றன. இம்மூன்றாம் பாகத்தில் சோழ மண்டலத்தின் 19-ம் நடு நாட்டின் 2-ம் ஆக 21 திருத்தலங்கள் வெளிவந்துள்ளன. மேலும் 3 பாகங்களில் 108-ம் முழுமை பெறுவதைக் கேட்டு மிக மகிழ்கிறோம்.

இத்தகு மாபெரும் தொண்டை பகவத்கைங்கர்யத்தை ஸ்ரீவைஷ்ணவச் செல்வி எம்.எஸ். ரமேஷ், ஐ.ஏ.எஸ். அவர்கள் பல்லாண்டுகள் திட்டமிட்டுத் தொடர்ந்து செய்த பெருமுயற்சியினால் செய்திருக்கிறார்கள். இவர் ஒவ்வொரு திவ்ய தேசத்தையும் நேரில் சென்று, வணங்கி, வழிபட்டுப், பூசித்து அவன் திருவருளைப் பெற்று, உண்மையான செய்திகளைச் சேகரித்து எழுதியதால் பொற்றாமரை மணம் பெற்றதற்கொப்ப இந்நூல் பக்தி மணம் கமழத்திகழ்கிறது.

இத்தகு சீர்மல்கும் வைணவத் தொண்டை பகவத் கைங்கர்யத்தை ஆஸ்திக உலகம் வரவேற்றுப் பாராட்டி மகிழும் என்பதில் ஐயமுண்டோ?

இதன் ஆசிரியர் செல்வி ரமேஷ் நீண்ட ஆயுளையும், நோயற்ற திடமேனியையும், மற்ற பாகங்களையும் ஆக்குவதற்கேற்ற பேராற்றலையும், ஸர்வாபீஷ்ட ஸித்தியையும் வாழ்வாங்கு வாழவும் இந்நூலை உயர்ந்த காகிதத்தில் அழகிய முறையில் வெளியிட்ட திருமலை - திருப்பதி தேவஸ்தானத்தின் நிர்வாகிகள் ஆயுராரோக்ய ஐச்வர்யாதி ஸர்வாபீஷ்ட ஸித்திகளை பெற்றுய்யுமாரும் ஸ்ரீரங்க திவ்ய தம்பதிகளையும், திருவேங்கடமுடையானையும் நாராயண ஸமரண பூர்வமாகப் பிரார்த்தித்து சுபமங்களங்களை ஆசாஸனம் பண்ணுகிறோம்.

நாராயண, நாராயண.

நியமனப்படி

ஸ்ரீகார்யம்,

ஸ்ரீமத் ஆண்டவன்,

ஸ்ரீரங்கம் -620006.

THE AYUDHAMS OF MAHA VISHNU

In each of these volumes dealing with the Vaishnavite Divya Desams series, an introductory chapter dealing with a general topic on Vaishnavism was presented. In the first volume, there was a chapter dealing with temples in general and another on the divine qualities of Maha Vishnu. In the second volume, the general chapter presented a pen picture of Mahalakshmi with select Lakshmi stotrams and their meaning in English. In this volume, a brief account will be given of the panchayudhams of Maha Vishnu with special emphasis on Sudarsana Chakra.

Maha Vishnu has pancha ayudhams i.e. five weapons. They are the discus known as Sudarsana, the conch known as pancha janyam, the mace (gadha) known as Kowmodaki, the sword known as Nandaka, the bow known as Sarnga. A genuine doubt may arise whether God, who is the Creator of the world, the Preserver and the Destroyer needs weapons. Actually, the Alwars look upon these weapons more as ornaments for the God and loose themselves in praising these weapons of the Lord. He is verily an astra bhooshana. The ayudhams are the symbolic tools He uses to achieve His objectives.

Amongst all the ayudhams, Chakrattalwar is the most powerful. It is believed that these panchayudhams are nitya suris who are protecting the Perumal and keeping a watch over Him all the time ready to rush at His behest, to achieve His spoken wish and unspoken thoughts.

Parasara while describing Vishnu in Vishnu Purana says that the intellect exists in Madhava in the shape of His mace. The Lord holds the two-fold divisions of egotism into elements and organs of sense, in the shape of His conch shell and bow. He holds in His hand in the shape of chakra, mind, which is the strength of all and excels wind in its flight. The bright sword of Achyuta is symbolic of holy wisdom and is used to tear the scabbard of ignorance of His devotee. Even the ornament Vaijyanthi the necklace worn by Vishnu which contains five precious gems viz. pearl, ruby, emerald, sapphire and diamond represents the five elements viz. sky, air, fire, earth and water. Thus, the lotus

eyed deity, the Supreme Lord of the Universe who is eternal who is the refuge of all beings, who in Vedantha is known as the embodiment of Rig, Yajus, Sama and Atharvaa Vedas is the true representative of the eternal and ultimate Truth. He uses these weapons to achieve His objective of rushing to the succour of His devotees. Similar thoughts are expressed by Swami Desikan also when he says that the panchayudhams add to the beauty of the Lord. Desikan says that the panchayudhams are the symbolic representatives of different qualities viz. tattvam as stated earlier. He also says that manas i.e. mind is the chakra. Sarngam is symbolic representation of sattvika, tamasa and rajasik qualities (Ahankara gunam). He says that the gada is the tattvam known as Mahan i.e. Buddhi. Nandakam, the sword is Jnana (knowledge). These symbolic representations are expressed when the great Tuppil Vallal i.e. Vedanta Desikan says as follows:

மாண் தண்டாக தெருள் மருள் வாள் மறையாக
அஹங்காரங்கள் சாரங்கம் சங்கக மனம் திகிரியாக

In the Vishnu Sahasranama the 1000th nama refers to God as "Sarva praharana ayudha" i.e. one who has all the weapons. It means that Perumal has these powerful weapons to annihilate His devotees' distresses. These weapons stay ever ready with Him to punish the evil doers and protect the distressed who seek refuge with Him.

The various weapons of Maha Vishnu are described by the various names that occur towards the end of Vishnu Sahasranama. Thus, the namas from 993 to 998 refer to His important weapons. Nama 993 refers to Perumal as "Sankha Bhruth". It means He is a person who holds the sankha i.e. conch. The conch is known as "Pancha-janyam". The conch is the representation and embodiment of the ahankara-tattvam. Tamasa is also known as ahankaram. It is the origin of the source of all the five Bhoothas. Nama 994 refers to Maha vishnu as "Nandaki" i.e. one Who has Nandaka, the sword. Nama 995 refers to Maha Vishnu as "Chakri" i.e. one Who has the chakra or discus. Nama 996 says Perumal is "Sarnga dhanva". Literally translated, it means that Perumal is the person who has the

bow named Sarnga. Nama 997 refers to Him as "Gadadhara" i.e. one who bears the mace. Nama 998 refers to Perumal as Rathangapaani i.e. the Perumal is one Who is armed with a wheel in His hand. Chakra and Rathangapaani mean more or less the same. The difference lies in the fact that chakra refers to the relationship of the possessor and the possessed i.e. it refers to God as one who possesses the chakra. Hence He is known as chakri. Rathanga paani seeks to convey the idea that God is ever- ready for action with the wheel in His hand. It is said that during the Maha Bharatha war Lord Krishna gave His word that He would not use any ayudha (weapon). But on the 9th day he wanted to control the fierce onslaught of the Pitamaha. He forgot the word He had given earlier when He assured Kauravas that He would not use any weapons while fighting on the side of the Pandavas. In His anger, He jumped down from the chariot, dropped the whip He was holding. Realising that He had no weapons in His hand, He is stated to have grabbed a chakram (wheel) from one of the broken rathas lying on the battle field. He rushed with that wheel in His hand towards Bhishma. Bhishma seeing Krishna running like this reminded the Lord of His earlier promise. That sight of Krishna running with the ratha wheel in His hand was ever green in the memory of Bhishma even when the latter was lying down on the bed of arrows waiting for his death. The Panchayudha Stotram is a prayer, praising and worshipping the panchayudhams of Maha Vishnu. Later on in this chapter, the stotram with its meaning will be given. For the present, it is sufficient to say that in the olden days people used to repeat the panchayudha stotram along with the Vishnu Sahasranama. It is said in the Phala stuthi that one who reads the Panchayudha stotram would be released from fears and sins. Be it in the forest, or in the battle or left facing any other danger, a person who repeats the Panchayudha stotram is assured of full protection by God.

In the Ramanuja Nootru-Andaadhi in the 33rd verse, the great poet Thiruvarangathu Amudanar says that the Panchayudhams of Maha vishnu were born in this world as Sri Ramanuja in order to save this world. That verse is extracted below:

“அடையார் கமலத்து அலர் மகள்
 கேள்வன் கை யாழி யென்றும்
 படையோடு நாந்தக மும்படர்
 தண்டும் ஒண் சார்ங்க வில்லுர்
 புடையார் பூரி சங்கமும் இந்தப்
 பூதலம் காப்பதற் கென்று
 இடையே இராமா றுசமுனி
 யாயின இந்நிலத்தே”

Swami Desikan in his Yathiraja Saptati also says that the five weapons of Lord Vishnu became all the more glorious by being born as Ramanuja. It is this belief that the five weapons assure complete protection which explains the practice in Tamil Nadu of children being adorned with "Aimpadaithali". An "Aimpadaithali" is an old ornament which is worn like a string round the neck. The figures of the panchayudhams are strung together and put round the neck of small children. This practice is borne out through many stanzas that occur in various old Tamil classics. For example, in Kamba Ramayanam it is stated "Thali Aimpadai tavazhum maarbidai". This is a description of a crawling child with the "Aimpadaithali" round its neck. Similarly, in Thiruvilaiyadal Puranam in one place it is said "Aimpadai Maarbil Kandaen" i.e. I saw the "Aimpadai" on the chest. It looks as if the "Aimpadai thali" was worn as a talisman to protect the children. But once the child attains "Bala paruvam" and is able to talk, then this "aimpadaithali" is removed, as the child is then expected to learn to recite the stotram on Panchayudhams. Thus, while the panchayudha thali was a raksha for the small kids, the stotram was a raksha for the children and the adults. Perialwar in his Tirumozhi pasuram (1-5-9) while describing Maha Vishnu in His avatar as Krishna, says that the child was more beautiful because of the "aimpadaithali" worn round its neck! This song with its meaning is given below:

Pasuram:

பாலொடு நெய் தயிர் ஒண் சாந்தொடு சண்பகமும்
 பங்கயம் நல்ல சகுப்பூரமும் நாறுவர
 கோல நறும் பவளச் செந்துவர வாயினிடைக்

The Ayudhams of Maha Vishnu

கோமள வெள்ளி முளைப போல சில பலலிலக
நீல நிததழகார ஐம்படையின நடுவே
நின் கனிவாயமுதம் இறநு முருததுவிழ
ஏழி மறைப்பொருளே! ஆடுக தெங்கேரை
ஏழல குமமுடையாய! ஆடுக ஆடுகவே.

Meaning:

Oh Enchanting blue hued Perumal (Krishna)

During the great Pralaya (deluge) you as a child floated peacefully on a banyan leaf after swallowing the seven worlds, and keeping them safe in your stomach;

The scent of milk, curds, ghee, sandal, shenbaga, lotus flowers and camphor gently wafts from you;

Your teeth in the back drop of your coral red mouth is bewitchingly captivating like dazzling pieces of silver;

Lest an evil eye be cast on such a heavenly sight the aimpadaithali (a chain on which the five ayudhams of Maha Vishnu are strung and worn as a talisman) is adorning your neck. The sight of the saliva from the child Krishna's mouth dribbling on to that aimpadaithali is captivating.

Oh Krishna please dance.

It will now be appropriate to mention the Panchayudha Stotram with its meaning in English.

Sri Panchayudha Stotram:

Stotra Stanza 1:

स्युरत्सहस्रारशिखात्तिथिं सुदर्शनं भास्करकोटितुल्यम् ।
सुरद्विषां प्राणविनाशि विष्णोः चक्रं सदाहं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

Meaning:

Ever do I seek refuge in Vishnu's chakra known as Sudharsana. This discus is very powerful and has a thousand spokes

of glittering flames which are equal to a crore of Suns and which kill the asuras, the enemies of Gods.

Stanza 2:

विष्णोर्मुखोत्थानिलपूरितस्य यस्य ध्वनिर्दानवदर्पहन्ता ।
तं पञ्चजन्यं शशिकोटिशुभ्रं शङ्खं सदाऽहं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

Meaning:

Shanka-conch:

I seek refuge in Panchjanya, (the conch) whose very sound filled with the air emanating from the mouth of Vishnu puts an end to the pride of the asuras. It is white like a crore of Moons.

Stanza 3:

हिरण्मयीं मेरुसमानसारां कौमोदकीं दैत्यकुलैकहन्त्रीन् ।
वैकुण्ठव्याघ्रकराभिमृष्टां गदां सदाऽहं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

Meaning:

Kaumodaki the mace:

I seek refuge in Kaumodaki, the mace of gold which in strength is equal to mount Meru. It is touched gently by the fore part of the left hand of Vishnu. It has no equals in its power to slay the asuras.

Stanza 4:

रक्षोऽसुराणां कठिनोग्रकण्ठच्छेदक्षरच्छोणितदिग्धधारम् ।
तं नन्दकं नाम हरेः प्रदीप्तखड्गं सदाऽहं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

Meaning:

Khadga the Sword:

I seek refuge in the shining sword of Hari, the sword is known as Nandaka. Its blade is smeared with blood from the necks of the rakshasas killed by it.

Stanza 5:

यज्ञ्यानिनादश्रवणात् सुराणां चेतांसि निर्मुक्त भयानि सद्यः ।
भवन्ति दैत्याशनिबाणवर्षि शङ्खैः सदाऽहं शरणं प्रपद्ये ॥

Meaning:

Sarnga:

I seek refuge in Sarnga the bow. Even on hearing that twang of the bow string, the Gods lose all their fear. It showers thunder like arrows on the asuras.

Phalastuti:

Any person who reads in the morning this hymn of the five great weapons of Vishnu will have all his sorrows, fears and sins removed and joy conferred on him. It is believed that if the people who are lost in the forest or who are caught in the battle-field or who are in the midst of foes or fire or flood or any other great calamity repeat this mantra, their mind will become peaceful and they will be protected by the weapons of Vishnu.

Now, for a brief account of the story connected with the origin of each of the five weapons of Maha Vishnu.

Pancha Janya:

A mighty asura lived inside a conch. Sri Krishna and Balabhadra(alias Balarama) were students in the ashram of Sage Sandeepani. On the eve of completing their education, an asura named Pancajana carried away the Sage's son as he was bathing in the Prabhsa teertha. The asura kept the child captive inside the conch where he lived. The sage was grief-stricken. He asked his disciples as guru dakshina, bringing back his son. Accordingly, Krishna and Balarama went to the banks of the river and prayed to Varuna. Varuna appeared before them. Krishna appraised him about the mishap and asked for assistance. With the help of Varuna, Krishna and Balarama killed the asura Pancajana and got back the son of their guru. The conch in which the asura lived was taken as a Memento by Krishna. Because the conch belonged to Pancajana the conch got the name of Pancha janya (10th Skandha Bhagavata).

Andal in her Nachiar Tirumozhi devotes ten pasurams for detailing the beauty of the conch and expresses in beautiful

words how she envies the conch which is in constant touch with the coral- coloured lips of Perumal! That is why in her Nachiar Thirumozhi she asks the rhetorical question, do the lips smell like the camphor on lotus? She says that the conch becomes great and powerful because of the constant touch with the divine lips of Perumal!.

Child Dhruva who started his penance hoping for a kingship, asked for moksha when God lovingly touched the cheek of Dhruva with His conch (Vishnu puranam).

Kaumodaki:

The club of Sri Krishna is known as Kaumodaki. This weapon was given to Vishnu by Varuna, the Lord of the waters. This is mentioned in Maha Bharatha (Adi Parva Chapter 224, stanza 23). It was given at the time of burning of the forest Khandava. It is said to be capable of killing every daitya and producing the sound of lightning and thunder.

Nandaka:

This sword of Maha Vishnu also has a story behind it. In days of yore, Brahma performed a sacrifice on the banks of the heavenly Ganga on a peak of Mount Mahameru. While Brahma was sitting in deep meditation Lohasura came to disturb the sacrifice. Immediately, a male being came into existence from the meditation of Brahma. The male being paid homage to Brahma and the devas. The Gods blessed and welcomed him. Even as the Gods praised and welcomed the male one, he changed into a sword called Nandaki. Nandaka means the one which gives joy. As the male being was welcomed, greeted by Devas and it gave them joy, it came to be known as "Nandaka". That sword was received by Maha Vishnu at the request of the Gods. Even as He took it Lohasura came near. He was an asura with a blue complexion with thousand hands and diamentine fists. He whirled his club and scattered the assembled Devas. Maha Vishnu then used the sword to cut down one by one the limbs of the asura. Those limbs became metals when the sword touched them. Maha Vishnu thus killed the asura. He then granted Nandaka a pure body. Later Nandaka became the deity amongst

the weapons on the earth. Thus, Brahma whose sacrifice was about to be disturbed by the asura was helped to complete the yaga by Vishnu through Nandaka.

Sarnga:

Sarnga is Sri Krishna's bow. The following facts are available about this bow, in the Mahabharatha. When Krishna showed His visvaroop (cosmic form) in the assembly of the Kauravas, He held in one hand this bow (Udyoga parva chapter 131 v.10). It is also said in the Mahabharatha that Krishna's sarnga is equal to Indra's bow called Vijaya (Udyoga parva chapter 158 v.4). Sarnga is one of the three divine bows (Udyoga parva chapter 158 v.5). It is said that Sarnga was made by Brahma and presented to Krishna (Mahabharatha Anusasana parva chapter 141).

Sudarsana:

Sudarsana is the discus. There are three stories about the origin of this weapon. One story says that the Sun God married Samjna the daughter of Visvakarma. Samjna complained to her father that she could not bear the radiance of the Sun. Visvakarma then put Sun in a machine and decreased his radiance. Out of the dust of the Sun produced by rotating him in the machine, Visvakarma is said to have made the discus weapon, the areial chariot pushpaka, the trident of Siva and the Sakthi, lance of Subramanya. Of all these weapons, the discus was given to Maha Vishnu. This is the story related in Vishnu Purana, amsa 3, chapter 2.

Another story says that once the forest khaandava was burning. Indra showered rain on that fire. At that time, the God Agni gave the Sudarsana discus to Sri Krishna and the Ghandeeva- bow to Arjuna to fight against Indra. Sudarsana is known as a fiery weapon (Agneyam). By using that the owner would be superior in the battle to all and it would return to the owner, after completing its task.

Yet another story mentioned in the Mahabharatha says that this weapon was given to Krishna by Mahadeva (Siva)

when the latter had killed a daitya who lived in the water. The Mahabharatha says that Siva called it Sudarsana as none could look at it except Himself. There is a jambu-tree on the Mount Meru. The fruit of that tree pours out a silvery juice and when the juice is drunk, it is believed that a person is relieved of decrepitude. The Sun and the tree of life are usually connected in all the books dealing with the origin of life and prosperity. The name of the tree also coincides with the name of the discus. There are therefore some who feel that it is not a mere coincidence that the disc is known as Sudarsana which means also the jambu tree.

Besides these stories about the origin of Sudarsana, several statements appear in various puranas about this weapon.

As Sudarsana was in existence even before Krishnavatara, the story that Visvakarma made it perhaps should be given prominence. Often Maha Vishnu used this weapon to destroy the enemies. Amongst all the incarnations, Sri Krishna used this weapon to the maximum.

Sudarsana's power is tremendous. It whirls to the enemies burning like fire. Once when Maha Vishnu sent the weapon Sudarsana towards asura, the havoc and destruction caused by the weapon is described as follows: The moment Vishnu thought of Sudarsana to destroy the enemies power it appeared immediately like the Sun in the Solar region. It was a sight which caused fear in the minds of all those who assembled. Emanating light and radiance from the blazing fire, the Sudarsana rested in the hands of Vishnu. He twirled it and threw it at the enemies with His powerful hands like that of a trunk of an elephant, with a view to cleave the city of the enemies into pieces. The weapon which was emanating great flames flew into the midst of the enemy army causing instantaneous death. It flew amongst the asuras, burnt them and whirled around in the air. It drank the blood shed on the earth and returned to the hand of Maha Vishnu from where it had set out. (Mahabharatha, Adi parva, chapter 19). In the Srivaishnava tradition this weapon is endearingly and reverentially called "Chakrattalvar". The suffix "alvar" refers to one who is deeply in love with God. •

Nigamanta Mahadesikan was the first sage who eulogised the greatness of Sudarsana to the world. It is said that once upon a time, in the Thirupputkuzhi village in Chengleput District of Tamil Nadu, people were suffering from a high fever. They were dying like flies. Nigamanta Mahadesikan prayed sincerely to Sudarsana and he read the beautiful Sudarsana Ashtaka stotra composed by him. It is said that after repeating this stotra the people in the village were cured of the deadly disease.

Sudarsana is known as Chakra Raja, Thiruvazhi Alwan, Hetiraja and so on. He is said to have been created in the month of Aani when chithirai star was in the ascendant. That which is held as invincible will be destroyed by this weapon with ease. Very deep rooted and frightening fears will be got rid of by Him. Such is his prowess. It is believed that Chakratalwar had been with Perumal (Lord Vishnu) always. Thus when the Lord killed Hiranyaksha during His Varaha avatara, Chakratalwar is believed to have been in the form of the two elongated (korai) teeth of Varaha. When Hiranya Kasipu's chest was torn during the Narasimha avatar, the nails on the ten fingers of Perumal are said to have received the sakthi of Sudarsana. Similarly, in the Parasurama avataram, Sudarsana assumed the form of the kodari i.e. the axe. In the Ramavataram, He was in the form of a flame. Whenever Rama let loose an arrow from His bow, it used to emit fire and kill his opponents. This bow and arrow of Rama are said to have been embodiments of Sudarsana. Even in Vamana avataram, Sudarsana helped Perumal. This is evident from the Tamil verse of Perialvar wherein reference is made to Sudarsana's assuming the form of Darbha-blade with which Vamana pierced the eye of Sukra who, as a bee, blocked the nozzle of the water-pitcher (Kamandala). Given below is that verse.

மிக்க பெரும் புகழ் மாவலி வேள்வியில்
தக்க திதன்றென்று தானம் விலக்கிய
சுக்கிரன் கண்ணைத் துரும்பால் கிளறிய
சக்கரக் கையனே.

அச்சோவச்சோ சங்கமிடத்தானே!

அச்சோவச்சோ.

It is said that once upon a time, Parvati and Parameswara were sitting on the ratna simhasana in Kailasa. Parvathi asked Siva as to which was the mantra which when repeated with sincerity would give karya-siddhi i.e. success in efforts. Parameswara then replied lovingly that He who repeats the Sudarsana mahamantra would successfully and surely complete whatever work he takes up.

Kura Narayana Jeer swami also was a great Sudarsana bhakta. He wrote the famous stotra known as Sudarsana Satakam. It is said that once upon a time in Srirangam the Oduvar, who used to sing Thiruvoimozhi was afflicted by a disease known as "Kanthamalai". He was suffering a lot. Kura Narayana Jeer who saw this could not bear it. He prayed to Sudarsana Alwar and the said Oduvar was cured. It is said that the Sudarsana Satakam was composed by Kura Narayana Jeer swamy at that time.

While Sudarsana is one of the weapons of Maha Vishnu, Sudarsana himself has got under his direct control, 16 weapons. Nigamanta Mahadesikan describes these 16 weapons of Sudarsana. He wrote the Shodasa Ayudha stotram i.e. the stotra on the 16 weapons of Sudarsana. It is believed that by repeating this hymn one can get rid of all fears and earn prosperity. The 16 weapons are as detailed below:

The weapons on the right side from the top are:

1. Cakra (discus)
2. Parasu(the battle-axe)
3. Kunta (the spear)
4. Danda (the club)
5. Ankusa (the goad)
6. Agni (the flame)
7. Nistrimsa(the sword)&
8. Sakti (the spike)

The eight on the left side hands are:

1. Paanca-janya(the conch)
- 2.Saarnga (the bow)
- 3.Paasa (the noose)
- 4.Seera (the plough)
- 5.Vajra (the thunderbolt)
- 6.Gadaa (the mace)
- 7.Musala(the pestle)&
- 8.Trisoola (the trident)

There are many interesting stories as to how Lord Krishna used the Sudarsana disc to vanquish the enemies.

The greatness of Sudarsana Alwar is evident more during Krishnavataram. To illustrate, Krishna, used Sudarsana to kill Sisupala and also to help Gajendra by killing the crocodile. He used it during the Mahabharata war to help Arjuna kill Jayadratha. The Sudarsana was used to humble Durvasa who, out of his ego, troubled Ambarisha. The same Sudarsana was used by Krishna to kill Pandraka Vasudeva who presumed that he was the true Lord Vasudeva Himself! Let us now briefly relate all these stories which clearly bring out the effectiveness and greatness of Sudarsana as an ayudha of Lord Maha Vishnu.

Sudarsana to the rescue of Gajendra:

There is a great splendid mountain called Trikuta which was encircled by the milky ocean. It is nearly 10,000 yojanas in height and width. There were a number of caves in the mountain which were used by Sadhus, Gandharvas and Kinnaras. The vales and dales in the mountain were rich with flora and fauna. There were idyllic lakes and streams. The sandy banks of those lakes and streams glittered like gems in that mountain valley - the pleasure garden of the great God varuna. In that garden was a lake full of golden coloured lotuses. It resounded with the sweet notes of the birds and the hummings of the bees having had their full of drink of honey. Once to that lake came the chief of the elephant herd which roamed in the mountain forest along with its herd of bulls, cows and calves. He smelt the fragrance of the lotus pollen in the tank and hastened to the tank along with his herd of elephants, to quench his thirst. He refreshed himself by pouring water on himself through his trunk. Enjoying himself in the water little did he realise the great danger coming towards him in the form of a crocodile. A giant crocodile stronger than him got his leg and was dragging him under. The helpless calves trumpeted in their grief. The elephant and the crocodile battled fiercely, tugging each other to and fro. It is said that this test of might went on for thousand years. The elephant was getting exhausted. But it looked as if the crocodile from somewhere was getting its energy rejuvenated. The elephant became helpless. He realised his end was near. He decided to place himself in the hands of the supreme God who is the last unfailing refuge. The elephant prayed to God.

He prayed not so much for relief from the crocodile's clutches but for enlightenment and moksha. He wanted to tear the veil which hides the light of the atman from this worldly routine act of living. Hari heard this sincere prayer of His devotee. He rushed to his rescue, raising the discus in His hand. The elephant prayed offering the raised lotus. Narayana let loose the discus which split the jaw of the crocodile. There was great rejoicing in the heavens. The gandharvas danced. The sadhus, kinnaras and sages praised the unfailing Almighty. Actually the crocodile was a gandharva in his earlier birth. His name was Huuhuu. He had been cursed in his earlier birth. Once upon a time Devala, a rishi was standing in the water and offering prayers. One day this gandharva was hiding in the water and pulled the rishi by his legs. The rishi got angry and cursed that the gandharva should be born as a crocodile. Consequently, the gandharva changed into a crocodile and he lived in the lake which was usually visited by the elephants for quenching their thirst. Gajendra the elephant whom he caught, was, in his earlier birth, Indradyumna, a king. He was a great devotee of Hari. But one day when he was deeply immersed in meditation, Agasthya Rishi came there. But the king, lost in his prayers, did not notice the arrival of the great rishi. As the King did not welcome him with the atithi satkaras the rishi angered, cursed the king to become an elephant. But even as an elephant the king continued his absolute devotion and dedication to God. Hence it was that wherever he went, he plucked a lotus flower and offered it to Perumal. It was on one such occasion that the elephant who was Indradyumna went to the tank where the crocodile (who was the gandharva by name Huuhuu in his earlier birth) pulled the elephant into the lake. The Lord rushed to the rescue of His helpless devotee who surrendered his all at His feet and sought refuge (Ananya saranagathi), and used the discus Sudarsana and saved him.

Even today, in the Sri Parthasarathy Temple at Triplicane, during Brahmotsava, on one day we can see Lord Varadaraja Perumal in a pose as if He is about to let loose the discus to destroy the legendary crocodile. Swami Desikan in his Navainani Malaī (7) sings about this incident in the following words:

மெய்யனே, அடியோர மெய்யனே விண்ணே
 நீசனே நீசனேனடைந்தேன
 அகயுமாழியுமாயக களிற் காத்தவனே
 காலனார தமரெனைக கவராது
 ஐயனே வந்தனறஞ்ச வெனறஞ் தென-
 னமிந்தை மாநகரமர்ந்தானே

Meaning:

O Lord of Thiruvahindrapuram! O Devadi Deva! O Lord who has the dark hue of kajal, the ocean, the peacock, the dark cloud and the emerald. O saviour of your devotees! You took the Sudarsana in your hand and ran to the rescue of Gajendra the elephant. O my master! I plead with you to prevent Yama, the God of Death, carrying me away. Instead, please come, bless me and give me salvation.

Sudarsan and Narakasura Vadha:

Narakasura was an evil demon. He had carried away Indra's umbrella of State and the ear pendants of Atithi, the mother of Indra. He had also taken away a number of women of noble lineage, imprisoned them in his palace. Hearing of all these evil deeds, Perumal mounted Garuda's back and went to Praag Jyotishapuram, the place of Narakasura. This place was surrounded by natural barriers of mountains, waters, fire and wind all round it, and was also cordoned off by Mura's strong chains. On reaching the place, Narayana used His mace to break his way through the mountains. He quenched the fire, water and wind with His sword. The huge rampart he broke with His mace. He cut the chains of Mura. Finally He blew His conch the panchajanya and the hearts of the bold demons surrounding Narakasura trembled. The deafening noise of pancha janya seemed to herald the apocalyptic i.e. it presaged the imminent disaster and total or universal destruction. Hearing this noise, the asura Mura of five heads who lay in the moat surrounding the palace arose. He was so fierce and flaming that none could bear to look at him. He rushed at Garuda with a trident held high in his hand. Hari broke the trident into pieces even as it sped towards Garuda. Mura then hurled a club at Perumal. The Gada held by the Perumal took on the club and broke it

into pieces. Mura was then angered further and he rushed with open arms towards Krishna. The Perumal then let loose the discus which cut off the heads of Mura in a moment. With his heads cut, Mura fell dead into the very water from where he had reigned causing fear amongst all the people. Seeing Mura dead, his sons started attacking Krishna using arrows, maces, pipes, spears and whatever they could lay their hands on against Him. But Lord Krishna smashed all this armoury with His arrows. Narakasura saw his forces reduced to shambles by Krishna. He therefore entered the contest. He hurled his satagani at God. The Lord then used the gada as well as His arrows to cut the arms, thighs, necks and bodies of the followers of Narakasura. But Narakasura went on fighting, though the army was fleeing. Narakasura used his powerful lance which had won victory over Indra's thunderbolt. But Krishna was able to treat this lance of Narakasura with scant regard. Narakasura then lifted his trident in attack. Before he could throw it, Hari cut off with the Sudarsana discus, Narakasura's head. On the death of Narakasura, the Gods showered petals on Perumal for having released the earth of one of her most problematic sons. The Earth Goddess felt so relieved at Narakasura's death that she personally came and handed over to Krishna the two ear-pendants of Atithi's stolen by Narakasura. She also returned Varuna's umbrella. The Lord then entered Narakasura's prison and released all the 16,000 noble women kept imprisoned by Narakasura. This is how Sudarsana Alwan was used by Krishna to destroy Narakasura.

Pasuram:

மன்னு நரகம் தன்னைச் சூழ்போகி வளைத்தெறிந்து
கன்னி மகளிர் தம்மைக் கவர்ந்த கடல் வண்ணன்மலை
புன்னை செருந்தியோடு பனவேங்கையும் கோங்கும் நின்று
பொன்னரி மாலைகள் சூழ் பொழில்மா லிருஞ்சோலை-
யதே

Meaning:

Lord Krishna who resides at Thirumaliruncholai is the one Who let loose the Sudarsana disc and ensured that there was no route of escape for the asura who thought that he was

invincible. He is the Lord Who also released the 16100 damsels kept imprisoned by that Asura. He is the ocean-hued Lord who is residing in Thirumaliruncholai hills which is full of groves of Punnai, Sura Punnai, vengai, kongu and other flowering trees. The flowers which have blossomed in those trees, seen from a distance, look like a golden garland adorning the hill.

Perialvar here refers to the attribute of the invincible power of destruction possessed by the Chakrayudha viz. the Sudarsana disc.

Sudarsan and Killing of Banasura:

Yet another incident in Bhagavatam where Krishna used the discus is when Bana the asura was killed.

Bana was the eldest of the 100 asura sons of Bali. He had thousand hands. By his deep penance, he had pleased Siva who granted him numerous boons which made him very powerful. Consequently, Banasura became arrogant. One day he met Siva and told him that the 1000 arms that Siva had given him became a burden to him as in the three worlds, he was not able to find anyone who could fight effectively with him. He said that his hands were itching for a fight. He therefore sought out the elephants to fight with them. But even the elephants fled in panic on seeing him i.e. Banasura. Hearing these vain glorious words, Siva got angry and He told him cryptically that when the flagstaff of Bana breaks into two there will be a fight which will humble the pride of Bana. But Bana was not worried with these words as he felt that there was none to equal him in the world.

Bana had a daughter by name Usha who was to be married. Bana had kept her safe in a palace never allowing her to go out. One day she dreamt she saw a beautiful prince. She fell in love with the dream hero. She got up from her sleep, agitated and shame faced. She wanted to meet the hero of her dream. One of her friends, the daughter of the minister of Bana by name Chitraleka was a close companion for Usha. Based on the pen picture given by Usha of the man in her dream, she

drew a number of pictures and asked Usha to point him out from amongst the pen portraits. She assured Usha that she would bring that person wherever he was in the world. Finally, when the picture of Aniruddha, son of Kama was drawn, she confirmed that she had dreamt of Aniruddha. Chitraklekha went by air to Dwaraka and with her yogic powers, she carried Aniruddha who was sleeping on a couch to the palace of Usha. Usha and Aniruddha unknown to their respective fathers spent their time happily. Meantime, the guards on duty realised that things were amiss. They informed the king of the disgrace to the family. Shocked, Bana went to the maidens quarters and there he saw Aniruddha. He was also taken in by the beauty of Aniruddha. Seeing that he was surrounded by Bana and his faithful followers, Aniruddha got ready to attack. He whirled an iron club in his hand and attacked Bana's followers. Many of them received serious injuries on their heads, thighs and arms. Then ran away. But Bana was even more furious. He tied Aniruddha by a serpent missile. Usha was beside herself with grief and despair. She cried but to no avail. Meantime, Aniruddha was missed at Dwaraka. Narada conveyed to Krishna the fact that Aniruddha was imprisoned in Bana's kingdom viz. Sonitapura. Krishna along with His chiefs went in haste to Sonitapura. He and His armies destroyed the city gardens, broke down the ramparts of the palaces. The gates were battered. Bana was angry. He rushed with his army to fight with Krishna. Lord Rudra sided Bana as Bana was a Siva Bhakta. Rudra on His Nandhi followed by His ganas fought with Krishna and His armies. The battles between Krishna and Shankara, between Pradyumna and Guha, between Bana and Satyaki became very fierce. Brahma and the great Gods and sages also came to witness this fierce fight. Krishna released from His bow, Sarnga number of arrows which routed the followers of Shankara. Siva aimed many weapons at Krishna, but Sarngapani fielded all of them with ease. Thus, the Brahmastra used by Siva was countered by another Brahmastra by Krishna. When Siva let loose the weapon of the wind, perumal let loose the weapon of the mountain. When Siva let loose the weapon of fire, Perumal let loose the weapon of the cloud. Finally the weapon of Pasupati met the weapon of Narayana. The combined army of Banasura and Siva was no match to that of Krishna and Pradhyumna and his followers.

Bana was angry. He got on to his chariot to attack Krishna. He drew 500 bows in his thousand hands and let loose two arrows from each bow. But the thousand arrows were child's play for Hari who with one stroke cut all the bows as also Bana, the chariot, the horses. He then blew on the conch. Hearing the loud noise of the conch, Bana's mother came rushing to save the life of her son. She stood before Krishna with dishevelled hair and prayed for her son's life. Bana then let loose a spirit of fever three headed and three footed which set as it were the ten directions on fire. On seeing that Narayana set His fever on it. The two fevers viz. that of Narayana and that of Bana fought. The fever of Bana had still not bated. He gathered all sorts of weapons with his 1000 hands and in a frenzy let lose his arrows at Krishna. Krishna then let loose the discus which cut off his arms as if they were branches of a huge tree. As the arms were being cut, Siva came running to the rescue of His devotee. He pleaded with Vishnu and said that Bana was His devotee and that He had assured him of protection. He therefore requested Narayana to forgive him. Narayana then said that He would not kill the asura as He had promised Prahlada that no descendents of his will ever be slain by him. As the asura was Virochana's son's son, Narayana told Siva that He had cut down the arms only to humble his pride and to reduce the burden on Mother Earth. He said he would allow Bana to have four of his arms in tact and that because he was a Siva Bhakta, the asura would have nothing to fear from anybody in future. The asura then fell at the feet of Krishna. He brought Pradyumnan's son Aniruddha and his daughter Usha to Krishna. He agreed to their marriage. Thus, Krishna used Sudarsana to humble Bana, the asura.

Peyalwar summarises this incident in a small pasuram. It is given below:

Pey Alwar Third Tiruvandaadi 92

மகனொருவர்க் கல்லாத மாமேனி மாயன்
மகனாம் அவன் மகன் தன் காதல் - மகனைச்
சிறை செய்த வாணந்தோள் செற்றான் கழலே
நிறை செய்துளன் நெஞ்சே! நினை.

Meaning:

O Krishna! You are son for none - you are the universal father. You are the origin. You are the Creator. Your son is Pradhyumna. His son is Aniruddha. O mind of mine! Worship the divine feet of that Lord Krishna who cut the shoulders of Banasura and defeated that asura who had imprisoned Aniruddha.

Sudarsana and the slaying of Sisupala:

Yet another incident in Baghavatam where Krishna used the discus i.e. Sudarsana in order to vanquish the foe relates to the story connected with Sisupala vadha. Sisupala is Krishna's aunt's son (father's sister). Even when he was born Sisupala had four hands and three eyes. People were aghast seeing that ugly child. But an aerial voice was heard saying that the person at whose touch the two hands and the extra eye disappeared, would be the cause of death of this child. Amongst the various people who came to see the child was Krishna. He took the child affectionately into His arms and immediately the extra two hands and eye of Sisupala disappeared. Sisupala's mother cried out in anguish that the son of her brother should be the cause of her child's death. She requested Krishna to forgive him whatever be the provocation. Krishna then promised to the mother that He would forgive 100 transgressions of Sisupala and that if he exceeds the 100, He will have to deal with him as he deserves. Right from the childhood, Sisupala was not favourably disposed towards Krishna. All the time, he was insulting Krishna.

Once upon a time, in Indraprasta, Dharmaputra celebrated a Raja-Suya yagam. He had invited many brahmins well-versed in vedas to officiate as priests. Other invitees like Drona, Bhishma, Drutharashtra and his sons, Vidura and many amongst the general public came to see the sacrifice. The kings and their ministers also attended. The sacrificial site was prepared with golden flowers and duly consecrated. Indra, Brahma, Siva and a host of Goddesses along with Ghandarvas, sages, yakshas, kinnaras and others also attended this sacrifice to be performed by the son of Pandu. On the day when the Soma juice was to be extracted, a question arose as to who amongst

the members of the assembly should be accorded the first honours. They could not come to a consensus. Sahadeva then said that Achyuta the great Lord (i.e. Krishna) should be given the first honours. He said that Krishna was the Supreme and that He was the universe and that He created, maintained and destroyed all that was in this universe. He was the embodiment of dharma. He therefore concluded that Krishna was the fit person to receive the first honours and that by honouring Him, the assembly would be honouring themselves. Hearing this, the son of Pandu washed the feet of Lord Krishna, sprinkled on his head the water which purified the divine feet. He honoured Him as the person found fit by the assembly to receive the fruits of the yaga. Hearing all this, Sisupala, the son of Damaghosha was furious. He got up and decried senior sages and the rishis in the assembly for having given their approval to what he had considered was an unworthy selection. He spoke harsh words. The Lord just listened to it with a smile on His face. It was almost as if He took note of the fury even as the lion is not disturbed by the howling of a jackal. The assembly members heard this vituperative abuse. They walked out closing their ears so as not to hear the abuses hurled by Sisupala. But Sisupala had lost all his sense of propriety. He snatched a sword and a shield in order to frighten such of the persons of the assembly who had sided Krishna. Krishna then got up. He advised the people assembled in the yaga site to show restraint. He let loose His discus which cut off the head of the advancing foe viz. Sisupala. But a light emanated from the body of Sisupala the king of Chedi and entered Vasudeva even as all the members assembled there were watching in surprise. It was almost as if the mind of Sisupala obsessed by his enmity to Krishna had yet been thinking of Him incessantly and thus in death the soul of Sisupala merged with the Supreme.

Perialwar went to Thirumaliruncholai. He saw Alagar Perumal there. While rendering his mangalasasanam to Alagar Perumal, he says that the Perumal at Thirumaliruncholai was none other than Lord Krishna who destroyed Sisupala who had as his life's sole purpose decrying of Lord Krishna. He said as follows:

“பல பல நாமும் சொல்லிப் பழித்த சிசுபாலன் தன்னை
அலவலைமை தவிர்த்த அழகன்”

Srivilliputturar describes this incident as follows:

Pasuram:

ஏவிய திகிரி வீரரைத் துறக்க மேற
விட்டிரு மிரவியைப்போல்
மேவிய பகையோ மைத்துனன் முடியை விளங்கு
கோளகையுற வீசி
யாவிகளைனைத்து நிறைந்தொளி சிறந்த வச்சுகனலை
கொள் பாற்கடலிற்
நீவிய வசிதமமரருக் களித்தோன் றிருக்க கரஞ்சென்று
சேர்ந்ததுவே.

Meaning:

The discus which was hurled by Krishna chased the warrior. The discus was bright and effulgent like the Sun God. It sped at the speed of lightning and beheaded Sisupala. Having achieved its task, it came back to rest in the hands of the Lord, who had earlier helped in churning the milky ocean, extracted the amruth and distributed to the Devas.

Sudarsana Alwar and Destruction of Malikan:

Krishna and Malikan were great friends. He learnt from Krishna the method of using the various asthras. But after having learnt from Krishna, he started misusing his authority and creating trouble for many people. Krishna tried to advise him to mend his ways. But Malikan did not reform himself. The only ayudha whose use he had not yet learnt from Krishna was the Chakra. He was pestering Krishna to teach him this one remaining art. God thought that this was a fitting occasion for him to teach a lesson to this Malikan. As Malikan was insisting that he should be taught the way to use the chakrayudham, He agreed to teach him. He first twirled the chakrayudham on one finger and then let it loose and asked Malikan to catch it so that he could be taught the nuances of using the discus. Malikan tried to catch it and he took his fingers towards his neck in the direction in which the disc was flying. But he was not able to

catch the Sudarsana Chakram. On the other hand, the chakram found its target viz. the neck of Malikan which was severed.

The Story of Sudarsana and the Impersonator Vasudeva:

There was a king of Pundra who was known as Vasudeva. The ignorant people flattered him as the descendant of God Himself. In course of time, the king thought that he was Vasudeva who had come down to earth. Forgetting his real character, he assumed the emblems of Vishnu viz. the conch and the disc. He sent an ambassador to Krishna asking him to give up the discus and the other insignia which belonged only to him. He asked Krishna pay homage to him and that he would bless him! Hearing these words Janardana (i.e. Krishna) laughed and told the ambassador that he may return and tell Paundraka that Krishna would come and personally hand over the emblem and the discus to the king. He assured the messenger that He would come to the city bringing the discus with him and hand it over to the king. Having sent the messenger back, Perumal summoned Garuda, mounted on him and started for the city of Paundraka. When the king of Kasi heard the preparations of Kesava, he sent his army to help Paundraka and the king of Kasi himself brought up the rear of the army. Thus, the army of the king of Kasi as well as the troops of Paundraka, the false Vasudeva marched to receive Krishna. Hari saw him at a distance with the discus, the club and mace, a scimitar and a lotus in his hands. He was bearing a bow and his standard was made of gold. He had also gone to the extent of having the mystical mark Srivatsa on his chest. He was robed in silk raiment to resemble the pitambara (yellow silk) worn by the Lord. In addition, he had dressed himself with the ear rings and a tiara. When the God saw this, he laughed aloud and started the fight with the hostile army. He let loose swords, maces, tridents, spears and bows. He showered with his sarnga bow a rain of arrows and with His discus He soon destroyed both the army of Paundraka and that of the King of Kasi. He then addressed Paundraka and reminded him that he had sent for him so as to hand over the insignia to him. God said, "I now deliver this insignia to you. Here is my discus. Here is my mace. Here is

my Garuda". Saying this, He let loose the discus and the mace. Paundraka was cut to pieces by the discus and he fell on the ground. Perumal then cut off the head of the Paundraka and the head of the ruler of Kasi was shot into the city of Kasi. The people wondered how this happened. Then they learnt that the king has been slain by Krishna. The King's son then prayed to Sankara. Pleased with his worship, Sankara appeared before the prince of Kasi. The prince asked for the boon that the mystic spirit of Siva should slay Krishna, the murderer of his father. Sankara granted the wish. Suddenly a formidable flame with fiery radiance streaming out her hair, arose. "She" was the "spirit" which was invoked to destroy Krishna. She was deputed to Dwaraka. On sighting that horrible demoness the people of Dwaraka were struck with terror, appealed for protection to the slayer of Madhu, refuge of all the worlds. Krishna realised that this fiend had been created by the son of the king of Kasi through the worship of the deity whose emblem is the bull. Perumal ordered the Discus to kill this dreadful creature whose tresses were plaited flames. Immediately, Sudarsana entered the field. He attacked the fiend. The fiend was terrified at the might of Sudarsana. The creation of Maheswara fled from the scene and ran to Varanasi. It was chased by the discus of Vishnu. The King of Kasi as well as the attendant dignitaries of Siva armed with various weapons marched out to attack the discus. But the Sudarsana with his radiance set fire to the city in which the magic power of Siva had concealed herself. Thus, was Varanasi burnt with all its princess and their followers, its inhabitants, elephants, horses, men, graneries, houses, palaces and markets. The city was covered with flames by the discus of Hari and was destroyed. The discus still blazing fiercely returned to the hands of Vishnu who calmed it down.

Sudarsana and the Story of Ambarisha:

Ambarisha was a great devotee of the Lord. He was also a very powerful wealthy emperor who had the seven continents under his control. But yet he was not spoilt by such wealth. He looked upon his prosperity as an evanescent piece of mud. He gave his mind entirely to the lotus feet of Krishna. All his time was spent in worshipping the Perumal and listening to the

glories of Perumal. He would visit all the holy places. His devotion to Vishnu is described beautifully in the Bhagavata when it says as follows:-

"He gave his mind to the lotus feet of Krishna. His words were devoted exclusively to describe the glorious qualities of the Lord of Vaikuntha. His hands were engaged in sweeping and cleaning the temple of Hari. His ears listened only to the tales of Achyuta's exploits. His eyes were engrossed in the place where Mukunda's images were installed. His body embraced only the Lord's servants. His breath was devoted to inhaling the sweetness of the auspicious tulasi. His tongue tasted only the food that had been offered to the Perumal. His feet took him repeatedly on pilgrimage to the shrines of Hari. His head was bent only in adoration of the feet of the Perumal". This great Ambarisha even shed all the pleasures of domestic life and the earthly possessions as also the precious jewels and wealth. God was pleased with this exclusive devotion to Him and gave His devotee His own discus which protected the devotees and was the terror of their foes. Once in order to propitiate Vishnu, King Ambarisha along with his wife decided to observe Dwadasi Vrata for a whole year. On the completion of the vrata, in the month of Karthika, he had his bath in Kalindi having fasted for three days and worshipped Hari in Madura. He then bathed the image of Lord according to rituals laid down for Mahaabhisheka. He decked the idol with jewels, sandal paste, flowers etc. He pleased the brahmanas who conducted the vrata. He gave them 60 crores of cows, their horns covered with gold, their hooves with silver and with splendid goods over them. The cows along with the calves with vessels for milking were gifted to the brahmanas. He gave them rich food, ample money and was about to break his fast. At that moment, Durvasa came there. The king honoured him, received him, prostrated himself before him and begged him to take food along with him. Durvasa agreed. He went to Kalindi for doing the obligatory mid day rites. He meditated on Brahma, had his dip in the holy waters. Meantime, the king realised that only half a muhurta was still left of the 12th day of the fortnight within which he should take food. The king was in a dilemma. Duty demanded that he should wait for his atithi. He consulted the brahmanas and said that duty also demanded

that he should break his fast before the 12th day of the fortnight expires so as to obtain the full benefit of the dwadasi vrata. He did not want to violate either of the two dharmas. The brahmanas then advised him that he could sip a little water as drinking water would be regarded as neither eating nor fasting. The king agreed with this decision. Having sipped the water, the king waited for the return of Durvasa. Durvasa returned from Yamuna. He knew by second sight that the king had partaken of water. Durvasa's body trembled with anger. He felt that the king had transgressed duty in not having waited for his atithi. He plucked a hair from his matted hair, raised an evil spirit out of it which was as fierce as the fire which comes at the time of the dissolution of the world. He directed that fire towards the king. The king saw this flaming apparition armed with a sword shaking its head and coming fast towards him. He closed his eyes and prayed to Perumal. The Lord's discus which He had sent earlier to guard His devotee spun into action. The discus burnt that spirit even as a forest fire might burn an angered snake. Durvasa saw that the discus was fast approaching him also. He ran to save himself. But the discus pursued him. Durvasa sought shelter in a cave of Mount Meru. But the discus went there also in search of him. The rishi realised that there was no place in the sky, in the earth, the subterranean regions, the oceans, the upper world etc., where he could hide and avoid the terrible Sudarsana. Finally, he went to Virinchi (Brahma) and sought protection. Brahma said that He himself being subject to the will of Perumal, acts as per His command and hence He cannot protect Durvasa. Durvasa then sought the protection of Siva who lives in Kailasa. Rudra also expressed His helplessness against the almighty Lord. He said that He Himself was a part of Lord Vishnu's maya and that Vishnu is the Supreme Lord. Siva advised Durvasa to go and fall at the feet of Hari Himself and that He will do whatever is good for him. Durvasa then went to Vaikuntha. With his body trembling with fear, he fell at the feet of Vishnu. He confessed to Achyuta that he had sinned by offending His devotee. He sought pardon. The Lord replied that He himself was in the hands of His devotees. His reply which appears in The Bhagavatam is also repeated in several places. God said, "I love My devotees and the saintly souls have by their love ravished My heart. I should have no

use even for Myself or for the Goddess Sri who is inseparable from Me, if I could not have with Me, My devotees who look upon Me as the Supreme goal. How can I give up the good men who have fixed their hearts on Me and have captured My heart by their devotion and who are perfectly content with serving Me? The saints are My heart and I am their heart. They know nothing dearer than Me and I know none dearer than them". The Perumal therefore advised Durvasa to go to Ambarisha against whom he employed the black magic and which had recoiled on Durvasa himself. God said that the evil that is employed against good men recoils on the doer. He advised him to go to the king for forgiveness.

Thus, instructed by the Lord, Durvasa who was tormented by the discus returned to Ambarisha and clasped his feet. Ambarisha on the other hand felt embarrassed and ashamed at the sage touching his feet. He started praising Hari's weapon viz. Sudarsana. Ambarisha prayed as follows:

"You are the God of Fire and the glorious Sun God. You are the Moon God, Master of the stars. You are the deities presiding over water and earth, over sky and air, over the subtle elements and the organs of sense and action. O Sudarsana, of the thousand spokes, beloved of the Lord, O protector of the world and Destroyer of all the weapons, You are dharma and satya, the sacrifice and the consumer of all sacrifices, You are the Protector of the worlds, the soul in all rites, the supreme puissance of the paramount Lord. I make my salutations to You. You are the protector of the three worlds. You are of dazzling purity and swift as thought and the doer of marvellous deeds. By your splendour O Lord of Speech, the darkness of ignorance has been dispelled and the minds of good men are enlightened. The world of cause and effect of high and low is manifested by you, your greatness is immeasurable. When you are despatched by Hari of the invincible spotless glory, you enter the forces of the daityas and the danavas and shine on the battle field as you cut down their arms, bellies their thighs and feet and necks. You, O Protector of the worlds have been appointed by the Lord to destroy wicked men. O You are possessed of all strength ensure the safety of the brahmana so that our family may

prosper". Thus, on appeal by Ambarisha himself, Sudarsana cooled down. Durvasa blessed the king and said that he had witnessed the greatness of the devotee of the Ananta. The king and the rishi then took leave of each other. This story details the way Sudarsana rushed to the rescue of the Lord's devotee.

Sudarsana and Jayadratha Vadha:

When the Mahabharata war took place, Lord Krishna drove the chariot of Arjuna. He came to be known as Parthasarathi. Jayadratha was the brother-in-law of Duryodhana. He was a very powerful warrior. Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna was also an equally valiant fighter. On the 13th day of the Mahabharata war, a number of warriors on the Kaurava side surrounded Abhimanyu. One of the Kaurava warriors who was mainly responsible for the death of Abhimanyu was Jayadratha. This news spread very fast. While the Kauravas were happy, Arjuna who heard about his son's tragic death was completely heart broken. He flew into a wild rage and without thinking of the probabilities or consequences, he in his deep anguish, announced loudly that he would avenge the killing of Abhimanyu before the Sun set on the next day by slaying Jayadratha the Kaurava hero who treacherously killed his son. Arjuna also added that if he failed in this vow of his, he would jump into the fire along with his bow Gandeeva and kill himself. Lord Krishna who heard this was very upset. He wanted to help Arjuna to fulfil his vow. The Kauravas who heard of the vow were frightened of Arjuna's fury. They thought the only way they could save Jayadratha was to hide him till the Sun set on the next day. Arjuna got even more angry as he was not able to locate Jayadratha. The evening was fast approaching. Arjuna was worried. Lord Krishna then decided to help Arjuna with one of His leelas. He directed Sudarsana chakra to fly to the Sun God and hide it. Sudarsana chakra obeyed. The moment the face of Sun God was covered by Sudarsana chakra, there was darkness everywhere. On the battle field, the Kauravas thought the Sun had set. There was jubilation in their side. Jayadratha was brought out of his hiding. Lord Krishna pointed out Jayadratha to Arjuna and immediately recalled Sudarsana chakra. The Sun therefore shone bright as before and Arjuna

was able to let loose his arrow and kill Jayadratha. The head of Jayadratha was severed and the vow of Arjuna was fulfilled, thanks to the intervention of Lord Krishna with His Sudarsana chakra. This action of Lord Krishna is described by Perialwar in his Thirumozhi pasuram 4-1-8 as follows:

நாழிகை கூறிட்டுக் காதலு நினை அரக்கன
தம முகப்பே
நாழிகை போகப் படைபொருதவன தேவகி
தன சிறுவன
ஆழி கொண்டனறு இரவி மனறப்பச சயத்திர
தன தலையை
பாழி நுழைப படை பொருதவன பககமே
கண்டாருளர.

Meaning:

Even as the Kaurava princes were eagerly counting the time when the Sun would set, Krishna, the son of Devaki fighting on the side of Pandavas, against the Kauravas, released Sudarsana which could fly faster than time to temporarily cover the face of Sun. He then pointed Jayadratha to Arjuna who killed him and the severed head of Jayadratha rolled on the ground. All the people witnessed Lord Krishna standing in the battle field by the side of Arjuna.

The famous shrines of Sudarsana Alwar:

Some of the temples have separate sannidhis for Sudarsana. Such separate shrines are at Thirukkovalur, Thiruvahindrapuram, Thirukudanthai (Kumbakonam), Kandyur, Srivilliputtur, Vanamamalai, Alwarthirunagari, Thirukkurungudi, Srirangam, Varadaraja Perumal Koil (Kanchipuram) and at Thirumogur.

In Srivilliputtur, in the Vatapatrasayee temple in the big prakaram on the southern side, there is a separate shrine for Chakrattalwar. The idol of the chakram consists of Sudarsana himself seen in a human form. It is known as Pratyaleedhaa Padambuja i.e. inside the circle the feet of Chakrattalwar are shown in a posture as if He is about to run - May be to carry out His Divine will. Sudarsana is referred to as "Trinetra" (having three eyes) and as "Jwala Kesi" (flame haired). Both

these are depicted in the Sudarsana idol at Srivilliputtur. There is a small story connected with this idol at Srivilliputtur. It is believed that once upon a time, Chakratalwar who is now in Srivilliputtur, was in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum). The said idol was said to be emitting fire and was in an ugra roopa (ferocious form). Once Andal was taken to that place and it is said that immediately thereafter the Sudarsana stopped emitting fire and became cool. Later when Andal was brought back to Srivilliputtur, Chakratalwar was also brought to Srivilliputtur. This story has got no basis in the puranas. But it is very widely believed to be true only through karna parampara i.e a story passed on by word of mouth from generation to generation.

The pictures of the Sudharsana Alwar at Thirumogur, Srivilliputtur, Kanchipuram, Kumbakonam and Srirangam are given in the beginning of this chapter.

Having related the stories connected with the greatness of Sudarsana, it will be appropriate now to conclude this chapter by quoting the verses from the Sudarsana Ashtakam and the Shodasa Ayudha stotram, along with their meaning in English.

Sudarsanashtakam:

1. Stotra:

प्रतिपत्त श्रेणि धीषण वरगुणस्तोम धूषण
जनि भयस्थान तारण जगदवस्थान कारण ।
निखिलदुष्कर्म कर्शन निगम सद्धर्म दर्शन
जय जय श्री सुदर्शन जय जय श्री सुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

O' Sudarsana!

The enemies take to their heels on seeing you;

Your glorious traits are shining like ornaments around your neck;

You steer your devotees safely through the treacherous waters of this Samsara;

The world exists because of you;

You annihilate the sins of your devotees;

You make your devotees follow scrupulously the tenets of

dharma as laid down in the Vedas;

Victory to you Oh Sudarsana!

Victory to you Oh Sudarsana!

2. *Stotra:*

शुभजगदुपमण्डन सुरगणत्रासखण्डन

शत-मख ब्रह्म वन्दित शत-पथ ब्रह्म वन्दित ।

प्रथित विद्वत्सपक्षित भजदहिर्बुध्न्य लक्षित

जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

You are a beautiful ornament held in the hand by Perumal;

You are the cause for the Devas losing their fear of the asuras;

Indra and Brahma salute you;

The Satapatha Brahmana which belongs to the Sukla Yajur Veda praises you;

The learned and the famous scholars seek your help for their success;

Siva who is known as Ahirbudhnya bows to you and acknowledges it in his samhitha;

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

3. *Stotra:*

स्फुटतटिकाळ पित्रर पृथु-तर ज्वाल पत्रर

परिगतप्रत्नविग्रह परिमितप्रज्ञदुर्ग्रह ।

प्रहरणग्राममण्डित परिजनत्राणपण्डित

जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन जय जय श्री सुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana

You have the golden colour of the flashes of lightning;

The tongues of flames around you look like a cage of fire around you;

You are surrounded by Vasudeva, Sankharshana and other holy persons;

Even those who have very sharp intellect are not in a position to grasp in full your greatness;

You look beautiful surrounded by all your weapons; You are an expert in protecting those who seek your help;

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

4. Stotra:

निजपदप्रीतसद्गुण निरुपधिस्फीत बहुगुण

निगमनिर्व्यूहवैभव निजपरव्यूहवैभव ।

हरिहयद्वेषिदारण हरपुरप्रोषकारण

जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

The Sages have unshakable faith in you;

You are the embodiment of the six great qualities of Jnanam (knowledge) Sakthi (power) Balam (strength) Aiswaryam (prosperity) Veeryam (bravery) and Tejas (fame) or luster.

The Vedas have spread your greatness far and wide; (like the Lord) You are also seen in the Para and Vyuh forms;

You got rid of all enemies of Indra (who has great faith in you);

You were the destroyer of Kasi, the town of Siva;

(What is more, you were the arrow which killed Tripurasura)

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

5. Stotra:

दनुजविस्तारकर्तन जनितामिमाविकर्तन

दनुजविद्यानिकर्तन भजदविद्यानिवर्तन ।

अमरदृष्टस्वबिक्रम समरजुष्टप्रभिक्रम

जय जय श्री सुदर्शन जय जय श्री सुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

You are the destroyer of asuras;

You steer your devotees from the dangers of this pitch dark

night of samsara;

You are the bright light which has put an end to their cycle of birth, death and rebirth,

All the Mayas of the Asuras are helpless before you. You see through all of them;

You rid your devotees of ignorance;

The devas have witnessed your acts of bravery;

You destroy the enemies in many ways;

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

6. Stotra

प्रतिमुखात्तीदबन्धुर प्रथिमहा हेति दन्तुर
विकटमायाबहिष्कृत विविधमात्मापरिष्कृत ।
पृथुमहायन्त्र तन्त्रित दृढदयातन्त्रयन्त्रित
जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन जय जय श्रीसुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

Your weapons are like a garland round your neck;

The Mayas used by Asuras are of no avail before you;

The colourful garlands worn by you, enhance your beauty;

Your form has been installed in the yantra (motif) to the accompaniment of very efficacious mantras;

You have been bound as it were, by limitless kindness and compassion to your followers.

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

7. Stotra

महित संपत्सदक्षर विहित संपत्षडक्षर
षडर चक्रप्रतिष्ठित सकल तत्त्वप्रतिष्ठित ।
विविधसङ्कल्प कल्पक विबुध सङ्कल्प कल्पक
जय जय श्री सुदर्शन जय जय श्री सुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

You are the eyes of the three worlds;

You are the embodiment of Rig, Yajur and Sama Vedas

Your effulgence i.e. Tejas, makes me realise that you are the quintessence of the three agnis viz. Garhapathya, Ahvaneeya and Dakshinagni for your devotees;

You are the shining, boundless quintessence of knowledge;

You are all powerful;

You are the universe

You are the embodiment of all acts

You destroy all the diseases and fears of the devotees

Salutations to you O Great Sudarsana!

Salutations to you O Great Sudarsana!

8. Stotra

धुवन नेतस्त्रयीमय सवन्तेजस्त्रयीमय

निखिस्वादुचिन्मय निखिलशक्ते जगन्मय

अमितविश्वत्रियामय शमितविश्वग्भयामय

जय जय श्री सुदर्शन जय जय श्री सुदर्शन ॥

Meaning:

Oh Sudarsana!

Knowledge is all the wealth for the great souls; When such persons approach you, you give them moksha;

Those who repeat the Six lettered mantra of your name, are able to attain easily all they desire;

The devotees worship you after having installed you in a yantra with six angles;

You are well established in all the tattvas (aspects of creation)

You are able to read the thoughts of your devotees and fulfil all their wishes - spoken and unspoken.

You are a veritable Kalpaka Vriksha conferring on the devotees limitless prosperity;

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

Salutations to you Oh Sudarsana!

9. *Phalastuti:*

द्विचतुष्कमिदं प्रभूतसारं पठतां वेदुटनायकं प्रणीतम् ।
विषयेऽपि मनोरथः प्रयावन् न विद्वन्येत रथाङ्गधुर्यगुप्तः ॥

Meaning:

Those who repeat

This Sudarshan ashtakam full of essence written by Sri Venkatanatha Vedanta Desika will be able to fulfil without a break all their wishes even if they wish for the impossible, due to the prowess of the chakra.

Sri Shodashayudha Stotram By Nigamanta Mahadesika:

(This is about the 16 ayudhams of Sudarsana)

1. *Stotra:*

स्वसङ्कल्पकलाकल्पैरायुधैरायुधेश्वरः ।
जुष्टः षोडशभिर्दिव्यैर्जुषतां कः परः पुमान् ॥

Meaning:

May the great Purusha - Sudarshana the King of weapons who is associated (attended upon) by sixteen divine weapons which are like sixteen kalas (aspects), bless you.

2. *Stotra:*

यदायत्तं जगच्चक्रं कालचक्रं च शाश्वतम् ।
पातु वत्स्वपरं चक्रं चक्ररूपस्य चक्रिणः ॥

Meaning:

The world is rotating like a wheel. Time is also moving like a wheel. Both are subservient and under the control of Chakrayudha the foremost among all weapons. The Lord Himself has taken the form of this chakra. May this supreme ayudha protect all.

3. *Stotra:*

यत्प्रसूतिशतैरासन् दुमाः परशुलाञ्छिताः ।
स दिव्यो हेतिराजस्य परशुः परिपातु कः ॥

Meaning:

May that axe, which created many axes held by Rudras, protect you.

4. *Stotra:*

हेलया हेतिराजेन यस्मिन् दैत्याः समुद्धते ।
शकुन्ता इव धावन्ति स कुन्तः पालयेत व ॥

Meaning:

May that spear which, when raised playfully by Sudarsana, caused mortal fear among the asuras and made them run away like a flight of birds - protect you.

5. *Stotra:*

दैत्य दानव मुख्यानां दण्डवानां येन दण्डनम् ।
हेति दण्डेशदण्डोऽसौ भवतां दण्डयेद्विषः ॥

Meaning:

Sudarsana uses the Danda (club) to punish the Daityas and Danavas who deserve punishment. May that Danda punish your enemies.

6. *Stotra:*

अनन्यान्वय भक्तानां सन्धत्राशामतङ्गजान् ।
अनङ्कुशविहारो वः पातु हेतीश्वराङ्कुशः ॥

Meaning:

Even as the elephant is controlled by an Ankusa (goad) the Ankusa weapon wielded by the unbridled Sudarsana helps to root out and destroy elephants in the form of worldly evanescent pleasures of the devotees of the Lord. May that Ankusa protect you.

7. *Stotra:*

संभूय शलभायन्ते यत्र पापानि देहिनाम् ।
स पातु शत वक्त्राग्नि हेतिहेतीश्वरस्य वः ॥

Meaning:

Another weapon of Sudarsana is the Satamukha Agni of 100 tongues. If one meditates on it, all the sins of men will get burnt up like moth before a flame. May that Satamukha agni protect you.

8. *Stotra:*

अविद्यां स्वप्रकाशेन विद्यारूपश्छिनत्ति य ।
स सुदर्शनं निस्त्रिंशः सौतु वस्तत्स्वदर्शनम् ॥

Meaning:

Sword is yet another ayudha of Sudarsana. Being an embodiment of knowledge, it can tear asunder the ignorance of devotees with its effulgence. May that sword grant you enlightenment.

9. *Stotra:*

क्रिया शक्तिगुणो विष्णोर्यो भवत्यतिशक्तिमान् ।
अकुण्ठ शक्तिः सा शक्ति रशक्तिं वारयेत् क ॥

Meaning:

Sakti i.e. spear is also an ayudha of Sudarsana. It represents the creative energy of Lord Vishnu. It is extremely powerful and of undiminishing potency. May that Sakti remove your weaknesses.

10. *Stotra:*

तारत्वं यस्य संस्थाने शब्दे च परिदृश्यते ।
प्रभोः प्रहरणेन्द्रस्य पावजन्यः स पातु क ॥

Meaning:

Panchajanya, the conch of Vishnu is next in importance only to Sudarsana. It is also construed as one of the subordinates of Sudarsana. It has the shape of Pranava (the sacred syllable OM). When blown, it emanates a loud noise which makes the enemies shudder with fear upto their innermost guts. May that conch protect you!

11. *Stotra:*

यं सात्त्विकमहङ्कारम् आमनन्त्यश्च सायकम् ।

अव्याद वधक्रूरूपस्य तद्धनुः शार्ङ्गधन्वनः ॥

Meaning:

The Rishis say that Sarnga bow is an embodiment of Sattvika Ahankara and that the arrows which fly from that bow are the Indriyas (sense-organs). Lord Vishnu who holds that bow has taken on the form of Sudarsana. May the bow held by Him protect you.

12. *Stotra:*

आयुधेन्द्रेण येनैव विश्वसर्गो विविच्यते ।

स कः सौदर्शनः कुर्यात् पारः पाराविमोचनम् ॥

Meaning:

Sudarsana holds in his hand a noose as one of the weapons. It is that noose which he used for creating the world. May that noose release and redeem you from the binding strings of Samsara (so that what is used to bind a person (noose) is praised as one which can release those imprisoned by the bonds of this Samsara).

13. *Stotra:*

विहसरो येन देवस्य विश्व क्षेत्र कृषीवत् ।

व्यज्यते तेन सारेण नासीर विजयोस्तु कः ॥

Meaning:

The world is a field to be cultivated. The Lord is the matchless supreme cultivator. The plough which Sudarsana holds as a weapon in his hand indicates this fact. May that plough confer on you victory in your battles.

14. *Stotra:*

आयुधानां अहं वज्रं इत्यगीयत कः स कः ।

अव्याद्वेतीरा वज्रोऽसावदधीप्यस्थि संभवः ॥

Meaning:

(Vajra is an ayudha of Indra. This was made out of the spine of Sage Dadhichi, with which Indra killed the demon Vritra. Amongst all the weapons Vajrayudham is most powerful). Lord Krishna, the Gita says, is Vajrayudham among the weapons (Such a Vajrayudha has become more powerful ever since it became one of the 16 weapons of Sudarsana). May this Vajrayudha made out of Dadhichi's spine, protect you.

15. Stotra:

विश्वसंहति शक्तिर्या विश्वता बुद्धिरूपिणी ।

सा कः सौदर्शनी भूयत् गदप्रशमिनी गदा ॥

Meaning:

The Gada (mace) is the embodiment of Buddhi. This gada of Sudarsana is well known as having the power to destroy even the world. May that Gada put down all your troubles.

16. Stotra:

ब्रह्मपतिषोदशालित्वं मुसलो येन येन कः ।

हेतीरामुसलेनाशु विघ्नतां मोहमौसलम् ॥

Meaning:

Pestle (Musala) is another weapon of Sudarsana.. It has the power and capacity to pulverise all the things in this world. May this weapon cure you of all the evils that arise and flow from ignorance.

17. Stotra:

शूलिं ह्यहं मनोर्बाध्यो येन शूलयति द्विजः ।

भवतां तेन भवताश्च त्रिशूलेन विशूलता ॥

Meaning:

Siva had expounded the Sudarsana mantra in the Ahir-budhnaya samhita. The subject of that mantra viz. Sudarsana uses the trident (trisula) to trouble and nettle the opponents and enemies. May that powerful weapon rid you of all your problems.

18. Stotra:

अस्त्र ग्रामस्य कृत्स्नस्य प्रसूतिं यं प्रचक्षते ।
 सोऽप्यात् सुदर्शनो विश्वम् आयुधैः षोडशायुधैः ॥

Meaning:

The Sastras say that Sudarsana is the Creator of all weapons in this world. May Sudarsana who wields all the above mentioned 16 weapons protect the entire universe.

19. Stotra:

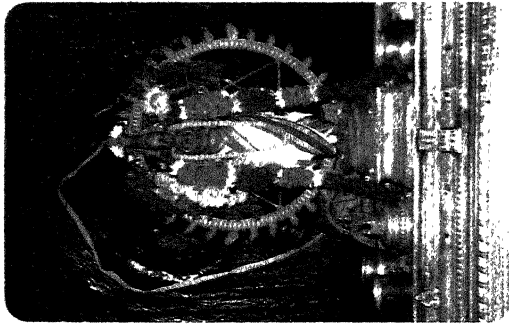
श्रीमद्वेङ्कटनाथेन त्रेयसे भूयसे सताम् ।
 कृतेयमायुधेन्द्रस्य षोडशायुध संस्तुतिः ॥

Meaning:

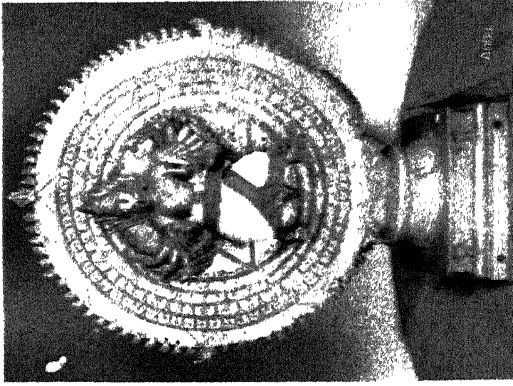
This stotra was written by Sri Venkatesa Kavi (Vedanta Desika) so that the people may have all prosperity. This poem has as its central theme Sudarsana and his sixteen weapons.

OM NAMO NARAYANA

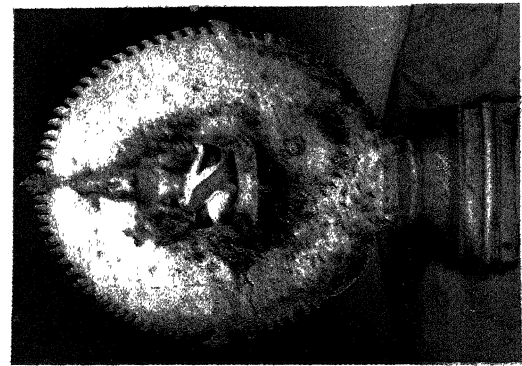
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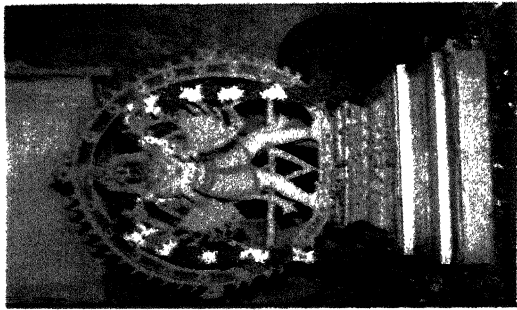
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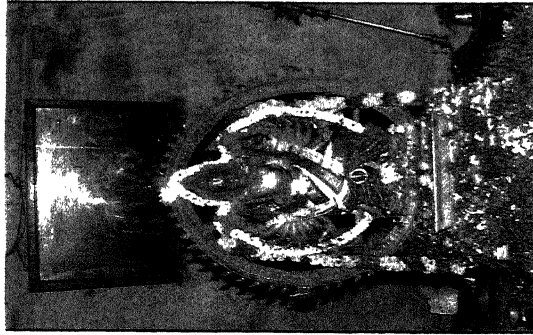
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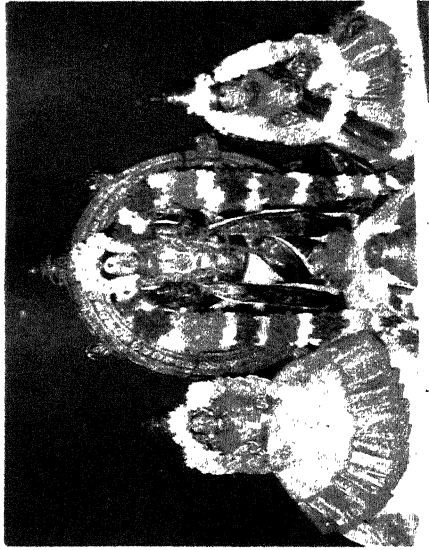
Thirumoghur-Sri Narasimhar



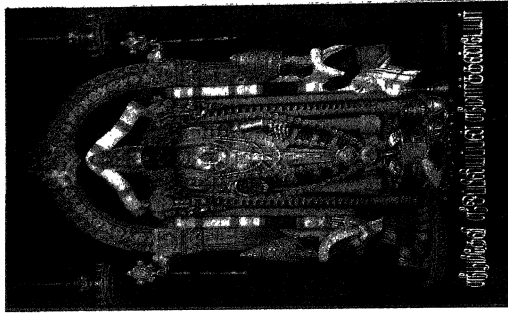
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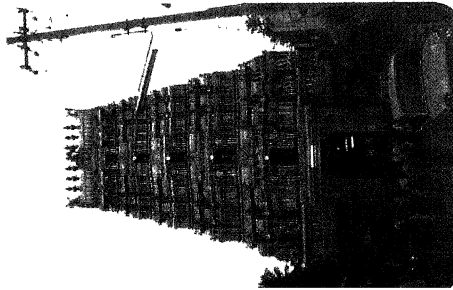
Srivilliputtur Sri Chakrattalwar



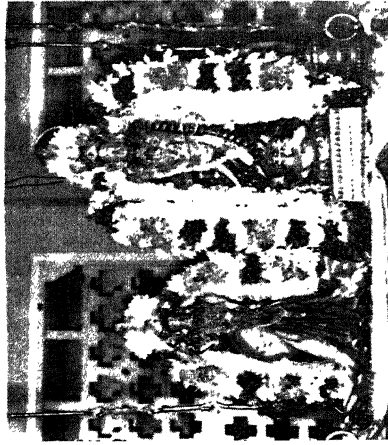
Thiru Kudanthai Sri Chakrapani & Thayar - Utsava Murthis



Thiru Vinnagaram - Moolavars



Thiru Vinnagaram - Gopuram View



Thiru Vinnagaram - Utsavamurthis

THIRU VINNAGAR (OPPILIAPPAN)

This divya desam is in Tanjore District in Tamil Nadu. It is about one mile from Thirunageswaram railway station and about four miles from Kumbakonam. The moolavar is known as Oppiliappan, Srinivasan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Goddess is known as Bhoomidevi. She is also known as Bhoodevi, Bhoomi Nachiar, Dharani Devi and Vasundara. She is seen in a "mandi ittu vanangum kolam" posture (semi sitting posture). She is facing north. Opposite Her is the idol of Markandeya rishi who brought her up. He is seen in a sitting posture facing south. His posture is like that of a father who is gifting away his daughter as a bride to the would be son- in-law (kanya dhanam pose). The vimanam is known as Vishnu vimanam as also Sudhananda vimanam. God appeared in this place before Markandeya rishi as also Kaveri Thayar. It is widely believed that the God here is the brother of Lord Venkatachalapathi of Tirupati. Hence the place is known as Then Tirupati (South Tirupati).

This place is known varyingly as Bhooloka Vaikuntam, Thiru Vinnagaram, Vyoma puri, Akasa nagar, Tulasi vanam and as Markandeya kshetram. Perumal has several names. As stated earlier, He is known as Oppiliappan. He is also known as Thiru Vinnagarappan, Srinivasan, Sri Venkatachalapathi, Ponnappan, Maniappan, Muthappan, Ennappan.

The mythological story relating to this place is related in Brahmanda puranam. Brahma is said to have related this story to Narada and other devas. According to Brahmanda purana, sage Markandeya was performing penance in the Tulasi vanam (the site of the present temple). To the south of this area were flowing the three rivers Dakshina Ganga, Dakshina Godaveri and Dakshina Yamuna. One day, the rishi saw a small baby girl under a tulasi plant. The child was very lovely and winsome. The rishi took her home, named her as Bhoomi devi as he found her on the ground underneath a tulasi tree. In course of time, the girl grew up. The rishi was very keen that he should get her married to Lord Narayana himself. One day in the month of Panguni, on Ekadesi day when Tiruvona star was in the

ascendent, an old brahmin wearing torn clothes, holding a stick in one hand to balance himself while walking and a kamandalam in the other hand, appeared before the rishi. The rishi wanted to treat him as a honoured guest, give him good food and then allow him to go his way. But the events turned out to be otherwise. The rishi washed the feet of the old brahmin and asked him as to whether he could help him in any manner. The old man then said "O rishi! Please grant me my wish. I have become very old. I do not have any son or a wife to look after me. I do not have any relatives in this world. I am alone. I have therefore decided to get married. I heard that you have a beautiful daughter. I request you to give her in marriage to me so that I could be happy and ensure a place for myself in heaven by performing all the poojas in true manner with a wife by my side. I have come to beg you to give your daughter in marriage to me". The rishi was astounded on hearing this request. He was in a quandary as he did not wish to hurt the old brahmin beggar by refusing to yield to his wish. At the same time, he did not want to give his beautiful young daughter in marriage to this ugly old beggar. He tried to dissuade the beggar from entertaining thoughts of marriage. But he found that the old beggar was adamant as he caught hold of the feet of the rishi and entreated him and said that his whole world and future depended upon his agreeing to give his daughter in marriage to him. The rishi tried to trick him and is reported to have told the old beggar that his daughter was very young, she was not well versed in the art of cooking and that very often she was in the habit of even forgetting to add salt in the food preparations and that she was incapable of preparing tasty food. He therefore asked the old man to look elsewhere for a suitable bride who could give him tasty food and be a fit companion in his old age. He added that if he were to give his young girl in marriage, then when the bride prepared the food that was not tasty, the old man may get angry with his wife and may hit her. Seeing his daughter in this impasse the rishi said that as a father and as a rishi, he might even curse the husband who ill treated the wife. He therefore pleaded with the old brahmin to turn his thoughts elsewhere and seek a more suitable bride. But the old beggar threatened to give up his life then and there if his wish was not satisfied. The rishi closed his eyes and started deep meditation and prayed to Lord Narayana

to find a way out of this repugnant piquant situation. Lo and behold, after his sincere prayers when he opened his eyes, he saw in the place of the old beggar Lord Narayana himself. The God appeared as a young youthful person. He held in his two hands the chakra and the conch. He was wearing a shining crown studded with precious stones. He was also wearing a number of garlands strung with precious stones. One of his hands was stretched out in a posture as if to receive the hand of his would be bride. The rishi was lost in happiness. He praised the lord for having fulfilled his one and only wish viz. to have the lord as his son-in-law. The God then smiled and told the rishi that he was very happy with the unshakeable faith that the rishi had in Him and He said that henceforth even as the rishi had predicted His would be wife need not add salt for any of the preparations that she makes. He said that only saltless preparation would be eaten by Him with a relish in that place. He promised to grant any other wish that the rishi may have. The rishi prayed to God to marry Bhoomidevi and stay on in the same place so that other devotees could also have His dharshan. He desired that the place where the Lord appeared before him should bear his name and be known as Markandeya kshetram and even as the God had agreed to have his food without salt, the devotees who come there should also taste only such food and enjoy it as a gourmet's delicacy. He also prayed that God may confer moksha on him. God granted all these prayers. He said that as He had left His heavenly abode (vin ulagam) (in Tamil means home in the sky) and has come to reside in this place of his own volition, the place will henceforth be known as Thiru Vinnagaram. The divine marriage took place in the month of Aippasi i.e. October-November when the Tiruvonam star is in the ascendant. The temple where the God and the Goddess reside was built by Visvakarma the divine architect and the place also came to be known as Aakaasa Nagar.

It is related that Lord Brahma himself came from Satyalokam to Thiruvinnagaram and celebrated for the first time the Brahmotsavam for the Lord. The first Brahmotsavam was performed in the month of Panguni when the Chithirai star is in the ascendent. Even today on the same day the Brahmotsavam is celebrated. The festival is celebrated for 8 days and

on the 9th day, when Ekadasi and Thiruvona nakshatram are there, a Thiruttare utsavam is also celebrated. On another occasion, in the month of Purattasi when Chithirai star is in the ascendent, Brahma celebrated another Brahmotsavam for a period of eight days and on the 9th day, again when the Thiruvona star is in the ascendent, there is a ceremonial bath for the Lord in Dakshina Ganga river, when Lord Brahma is also said to participate in the holy bath. Even today, in the month of Purattasi and Panguni the two Brahmotsavams are celebrated and it is said that Lord Brahma with the other Devas come to Thiruvinnagaram and supervises the performance of Brahmotsavams.

There are a number of theerthams in this place. There is a tank inside the temple in the northern part known as Agoratra pushkarini. There is a story connected with this theertham. It is said that once upon a time, there was a brahmin named Devasarma. He was a descendant of Bharadwaja rishi. He was well versed in the vedas. But due to his bad luck, once he misbehaved with the daughter of Jaimini muni and thus incurred the wrath of Jaimini muni. The muni cursed that the brahmin should become the kirounjam bird (Heron). Deva Sarma felt ashamed and requested the muni to forgive him and save him from the ill effects of the curse. The muni then advised the brahmin that as soon as he became a bird, he should go to Markandeya kshetram and take his position in the branch of a tree on the bund of the tank inside the temple. He said that later that branch will be affected by cyclonic winds and will fall into the tank. When the holy waters of the tank touch the body, he would be released from the curse. As cursed, the brahmin was transformed into a Krounja bird. He then flew to Thiruvinnagaram and was hanging on one of the branches of the tree on the tank bund inside the temple. As was predicted, in due course, there was fierce cyclonic wind in the middle of the night and the branch broke and fell into the tank. The bird which had this accidental dip in the holy water was redeemed of the curse and resumed his human form and proceeded to Vaikunta. At that time, the servants of Lord Varuna looked at the brahmin and asked him O Brahmin! Usually people are not supposed to have a bath in the tank during the night. We have also been told that those who transgress this rule should be punished and

asked him why he should not be punished for violating this norm. They stopped the brahmin from proceeding to Vaikuntam. Then the Vishnu envoys who had brought the vimanam to take the brahmin to Vaikuntam replied that the messengers of Varuna apparently did not know the special significance of this tank and its great quality. They said that a bath in this theertham by day or night would be blessed. They said this and resumed their journey to Vaikuntam with the brahmin. Since that day, the pushkarini came to be known as Agoratra pushkarini. Even today there is a tulasi tree near the tank and whoever sits under the tree, repeats the Ashtakshara mantram and gives small gifts of cash and good food to others is said to get rid of his sins and attain vaikuntam.

Saranga Theertham:

To the southwest of this temple there is a tank which is known as Saranga theertham. This is also regarded as a very holy tank. It is held in greater regard and reverence than even the Duanuskodi theertham.

Surya Theertham:

This theertham lies to the north of Saranga theertham also regarded as very holy. Once upon a time, Lord Siva is said to have plucked one of the five faces of Lord Brahma. To expiate that sin, he visited various holy shrines. This was the one among the places which He visited. Sun God is said to have repaired and renovated the tank and hence the name 'Surya theertham'. It is also believed that once upon a time, Lord Siva had a bath in this tank in order to rid himself of the sin of having killed Daksha.

Yet another theertham is to the northwest of this place known as Indra theertham. Once upon a time, Lord Indra had his bath in this tank in order to wash off his sin for having misbehaved with Ahalya.

To the south of Indra theertham is Brahma theertham. It is believed that Lord Brahma himself had a bath in this tank and only then got installed as Brahma.

To the south of the Srinivasa temple, the river which is flowing is known as Dakshina Ganga. Today it is known as Nattaru. It is believed that once upon a time, the Rivers Ganga and Godaveri approached Lord Brahma and requested him to cleanse them of the accumulated sins of all the pilgrims who bathe in them to attain purity. They requested Brahma to tell them of a place where they could in turn wash away the accumulated sins. Brahma advised them to go to Kumbakonam where he said that river Kaveri splits into two channels in order to encircle the Sarangapani temple. He also advised them to join the southern channel of Kaveri at Kumbakonam and flow along with the river till they reach to the west of Markandeya kshetram. He further advised them to break into two channels after reaching Markandeya kshetram and that the water would then be used for performing Thirumanjanam to Lord Srinivasa (Oppiliappan) so that they would then be rid of all their sins. It is also believed that the rivers Godaveri and Yamuna also are flowing near this kshetram. Dakshina Godaveri is known as Kerthi manaru and Dakshina Yamuna is known as Arisollaru. Thus, the three holy rivers viz. Ganga, Godaveri and Yamuna are also believed to have merged and flowing with the waters of the river around the Markandeya kshetram, to get purified, by association with the presiding deity of this place viz. Lord Oppiliappan.

This is a vadagalai temple. A shrine devoted to Sri Vedanta Desika is situated just near the garbagriha. Sri Desikan enjoys an important position in all the festivals in the temple since his idol is taken in procession just ahead of the Divya prabandha ghoshti for all the festivals.

A special significant aspect of this temple is that there is no separate sannidhi for the Thayar. The Thayar is seen only along with God in the main shrine. Another peculiar aspect is that the Utsavar is never taken out in procession all by himself. In all the processions, the utsavar is accompanied by the idol of Bhoomi Devi.

Epigraphical Highlights:

In spite of its antiquity, there is not much of epigraphical evidence available in this temple. There is only one inscription on a stray stone built into the north and southern walls of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in Oppiliaippan temple. This inscription is in Tamil and it registers a grant of land to the Srivaishnavas of Thiruvinnagar-Appan temple for meeting the expenditure towards offerings and celebrating the festivals for God.¹

Hymnology:

Four Alvars have sung in praise of the Lord in this divya desam. Nammalwar has sung eleven pasurams, Tirumangai Alwar thirty four pasurams, Poigai Alwar one pasuram and Pey Alwar two pasurams.

Saint Nammalwar the greatest of mystic poets in said to have been seated under a tamarind tree in the Alwar Thirunagari in Tirunelveli district and there he had the vision of all the deities. But he has sung in praise of the Perumals of only five divya desams in Chola Nadu, one among which is Oppiliaippan sannidhi. The saint says that this Perumal excels in bringing harmony and unity between things that cannot apparently be united. Apparently, the Lord appeared before Nammalwar in five forms and even today, in the temple we can see God in these five forms. These are as follows: The moolavar is called Thiru Vinnagarappan; the utsavar is known as Ponnappan. The Bhogamurthi is known as Muthappan. The other two are En-nappan and Maniappan and they have separate shrines within the precincts of the temple. Nammalwar was so taken in by the charm of the Lord that he said that the Lord is unique and unequalled. Literally translated this means "Than oppar il Appan" ("தன் ஒப்பார் இல் அப்பன்") which seems to have been corrupted through the ages as Oppiliaippan.

The following pasuram of Nammalwar from Thiruvaimozhi is very important as the different names of this Lord are used in this pasuram:

Thiruvai Mozhi 6th pattu 3rd Thiruvoimozhi: 6-3-9):

என்னப்பன் எனக்காயிடு ளாய் என்னைப் பெற்றவளாய்
 பொன்னப்பன் மணியப்பன் முத்தப்பனுமாய் என்னப்ப-
 னுமாய்
 மின்னப் பொன்மதிள்கூழ் திருவிண்ணகர் சேர்ந்த அப்பன்
 தன்னொப்பா ரில்லப்பன் தந்தனன் தன் தாள் நிழலே.

Meaning:

The Lord who is residing at Thiru Vinnagar which is filled with golden coloured clouds is unique and has no equals; He will surely resolve all my problems. I have been lucky to be blessed by His divine feet - the feet which have the ability to bring back to life even those who are dead. That Lord is my father as well as the mother who bore me and brought me up (En appan). His body has the effulgence of gold (Ponnappan). He is adorned with bright shining jewels studded with precious stones (Mani appan). He is cool and calm like the precious pearls (Muthappan). I have thus seen him in different forms in this place.

Pey Alwar Third Thiruvandadhi 61st pasuram:

பண்டெல்லாம் வேங்கடம் பாற்கடல் வைகுந்தம்
 கொண்டங் குறைவார்க்குக் கோயில் போல் - வண்டு
 வளங்கிளரும் நீள்சோலை வண் பூங் கடிசை
 வளங்குமரன் தன் விண்ணகர்.

Meaning:

The Perumal who resides at Vaikuntam can also be seen at Thiruparkadal, Thiruvengkatam, beautiful Sholinghur filled with thick groves full of humming bees and at Thiruvinnagaram where He is seen as an ever young person.

Nammalwar Thiruvoimozhi 6-3-1

நல்குரவும் செலவும் நரகும் சுவர்க்கமுமாய்
 என்பகையும் நட்பும் விடமும் அமுதமாய்
 பல்வகையும் பரந்த பெருமான் என்னையாள்வானை
 செல்வம் மல்கு குடித் திருவிண்ணகரக் கண்டேனே.

Meaning:

I saw
 my Lord
 at Thiruvinnagaram - a place where many prosperous persons
 live
 He is my master;
 He is omnipresent and omniscient;
 He is all pervading;
 He is several things and all things at the same time;
 He is heaven as well as hell;
 He is enmity as well as friendship;
 He is poison as well as Nectar;
 He is prosperity as well as poverty;
 Yet He is one - The absolute ultimate Truth!

Tirumangai Alwar Peria Tirumozhi 6-2-9:

போதார தாமரை யாளபுல விகுவு வானவர் தம்
 கோதா! கோதில் செங் கோலகுடை மன்னரிடை நடந்த
 தூதா! தூமொழி யாய்! சுடர போவென மனத்திருநத
 வேதா! நின்னடைந்தேன திருவினனாகர மேயவனே!

Meaning:

Oh God you who reside at Thiruvinnagaram
 You who are the greatest amongst all the Gods;
 You who have the divine mother on your chest always
 and are inseparable from her;
 You who espoused the cause of the Just Pandavas;
 You who are gentle in your speech;
 Oh Vedaswaroopa you are the light in my mind (cause for
 enlightenment)
 I seek protection and refuge at your lotus feet.

Divya Kavi Pillai Peumal Iyengar 108 Tirupathi Andadi

கையும் உரையும் கருத்தும் உனக்கே அடிமை
 செய்யும்படி நீ திருத்தினாய்! - ஐயா

திரு விண்ணகராளா! சிந்தையிலும் எண்ணேன்
பெரு விண்ணக ரானும் பேறு.

Meaning:

The Lord who is at Thiru Vinnagar

My master!

You reformed me such that now my speech, my hands, my thoughts are all yours.

As a result even if I am given an opportunity to rule over Devaloka, I will not even give it a moment's thought (I will reject it outright without a second thought).

* * *

THIRU CHITRA KUTAM

Thiru Chitrakutam, more famously known as Chidambaram, is, for many, associated with Nataraja i.e. the Dancing Siva. Very few would immediately recognise it also as a vaishnavite shrine and that too one of the 108 vaishnavite divya desams. In fact, Chidambaram is a place which is held in high veneration both by the saivites and the vaishnavites. The vaishnavite sthala purana is based upon Brahmanda puranam, Kshetra kadam. Visvakarma, the divine architect is believed to have built Thiru Chitrakutam. According to the saivite sthala puranam, Paramasiva made this place His abode and hence this place is known as Chit Ambalam meaning the presence of the cosmic Being as Akasa (Ether). The place is also known as Perum patrapuliyur as Vyagrapatha rishi i.e. Pulikal munivar (Rishi with feet like that of tiger) the devout sage did penance here and had the darshan of Siva as Nataraja. It is known as Pundarikapuram for saivites and as Thillai nagar Thiru Chitrakutam for vaishnavites. The shrine for Sri Govindaraja at Thiru Chitrakutam faces east and lies close to the chit sabha of Sri Nataraja who faces south. Another peculiar feature is that no where else do we find an ancient Vishnu sthala complete with separate tower, Bali peetam, dwajasthambam and Garuda shrine facing the Lord, a separate Thayar shrine with a separate management of its own with its own rituals in such close proximity to the sanctum sanctorum of Siva. Both the sthalas are encompassed in one place.

Chidambaram is in South Arcot district. It is well connected by train as well as by bus. As soon as one enters the town, the big temple with its four majestic gopurams serves as a landmark for miles around. It is about 150 miles to the south of Madras. The town though not big has well planned streets with geometrical symmetry. The four main streets are all laid out on a strictly square pattern. The actual age of this shrine can hardly be assessed as nowhere in the recorded history do we come across any authentic account of the birth of this famous shrine. Koyir puranam a very ancient record speaks of a 6th century Pallava King Simhavarman (550-575) as having worshipped the original deity in Thillai forests. There are other records of reference

both in Tamil and in Sanskrit which refer to Thillai as an established Siva sthalam. The Sabha where the dance took place and the other mantapas and Sabhas in the temple are all very impressive. While the gopurams have an air of stately grandeur, the atmosphere of the Sabhas is one of religious sublimity. There are in all five Sabhas of which the Nritta Sabha is the most spectacular and the piece de resistance in the whole area. This is the hall where the Lord of Thillai viz. Siva is stated to have entered into a dancing competition with the Goddess!

The moolavar here is known as Govindarajan. The vi-graha of Sri Govindaraj is a massive majestic figure reclining on Adishesha with the figures of Brahma, Sridevi and Bhoodevi by His side. He is seen in a boga sayana pose facing east. The utsavar is known as Parthasarathi and Devadi devan. He is seen in a sitting posture with chaturbhujam, shanku, chakram and His right hand raised in gnana mudra (Upadesa mudra). The Ubhaya Nachiyars are also seen by His side.

The shrine has had a non controversial existence upto the time of the Chola Kings. Worship was offered to both the deities in the appropriate manner. But apparently, during the period of the Chola Kings Vikrama Chola and his son Kulottunga II (first half of the 12th century) Chitra kutam as a vaishnavite shrine was pushed to the background, as those Kings were ardent saivites. Nataraja was their family deity and they used their vast wealth for providing magnificent edifices and endowments to the saivite shrine. Actually, the vaishnavites felt that there was a serious danger to the utsava vigrahams of even the Perumal and hence the utsava murthi was removed to Lower Tirupati. It was after many years when the fortunes of the Cholas varied and the Vijayanagara Kings Ramaraya and Achutaraya, successors of the famous Krishnadevaraya took serious interest in the vaishnavite shrines, that Chitrakutam as a vaishnavite divyadesam gained in importance. The temple was re-consecrated in the first half of the 16th century. In 1539 Achuta Devaraya is said to have ordered the installation of Thillai Govindaraja according to Vaikanasa sastra and granted 500 gold coins for meeting the expenses of daily worship. However that order was not implemented and it

was left to Krishnappa Nayak of Gingee, a Vijayanagara chieftain to carry out the various reconstruction and improvements for the tower, dwajasthambam, garbagriha etc., of the temple. All those renovations took place in 1599. Further extensions and construction of vimanam and mandapam etc., were made in the first half of the 17th century also.

Let us now turn to the mythological stories connected with this divya desam. The stories connected with this divya desam are related to Bavishyotra puranam Kshetra katham in the chapters dealing with Krishna kshetra mahatyam. The Chitra kuta vaibhavam and the mythological stories connected with the divya desam are told by Vyasa Maharishi to Jaimini rishi.

Once upon a time in Kiruta yugam, Kanva rishi undertook deep penance on the top of Meru parvatham. After a number of years, Perumal appeared before him and asked him to choose his boon. Kanva rishi asked for moksham and he wanted Perumal to rid him of the desire to live in this world. The Lord then replied that he had to live for some more time in this world. He advised him to visit all the punya theerthams, perform homams and do a lot of charity and go to Pundarikapuram where Visvakarama the divine architect had at the behest of Brahma created a town in the form of a lotus. Perumal advised him to go to that place known as Pundarikapuram, and said that there will be a pushkarini by name Pundarika pushkarini. He asked Kanva rishi to go there have his bath and worship him and that in due course He would appear and then grant him his wish. Kanva rishi accordingly moved from Meru parvatham due south and reached a place which was full of thillai trees. In the midst of that thillai vanam, he saw Pundarikapuram and started his penance. The severity of his penance attracted the attention of Indra and other devas. They were worried that Kanva rishi may be having an eye on becoming very powerful and acquiring all their kingdoms. The devas led by Indra went to Satyaloka and shared their fear with Brahma. Brahma assured Indra and other devas about the harmless nature of the penance of Kanva rishi. However, they all went and met Lord Sankara in Kailash. Lord Siva also assured them that the muni was not aspiring either for Brahma

Padam or Indra Padam and that he was only praying in order to attain moksha. However to get this assessment of theirs confirmed they went to Thirupparkadal and met Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu then assured them that Kanva rishi had gone to Thillaivanam and was praying on the banks of Pundarika theertham at His behest and that in the earlier yuga, he had promised the rishi moksha after his prayers at Pundarikapuram. He therefore advised all the devas to go to Pundarikapuram and to build a Chitrakutam for the Perumal. He said that he would be shortly appearing at Pundarikapuram. One day, as promised, perumal seated on Garuda Vahanam appeared before Kanva rishi. Kanva rishi asked him for four boons. First he desired that God should continue to stay in Thillai Thiruchitrakutam and give his dharshan to all the devotees who come to that place. Secondly, he wished that whoever even thought of Thillai Thiruchitrakutam or visited the place should be blessed with the four purusharthas viz. dharma, artha, kama and moksha. Thirdly, he desired that those who give up their mortal coils in this place should be assured of moksha. Lastly he desired that he should be blessed with moksha and be allowed to stay for ever with the Perumal. God granted all these boons.

In the meantime, as God decided to stay on in His Archa form in the same place, Brahma asked Visvakarma as well as the asura architect Mayanan to construct the Chitrakutam in that place. Accordingly, a beautiful temple was built for God. The Satvika vimanam was also built. The pancha boothams became the five kalasas on the top of the sanctum sanctorum. The four vedas became the four gopurams and the 36 smruti sutras became the 36 entrances in the temple. The thousand names of God became the thousand pillared mandapam. The astaksharam became the eight steps that lead to the sanctum sanctorum. On completion of this temple by the divine architect, the devas started praising the Perumal; the divine dundubi was heard, a veritable rain of flowers was noticed and in the midst of all this joy and pomp, God lay down in the Ratna Sabhai on Pranava peetam, under the Satvika vimanam. He lay down facing east on His divine couch viz. Adishesha. It is believed that on the day, God in His Archa form entered this place Brahma performed a Brahmotsavam. This is the story of how Kanva

Maharishi attained moksha after praying at Thiruchitrakutam.

Yet another story realting to this divya desam deals with the story of King Kavera. In treta yugam, in the Surya vamsa, there was a king by name Kalingaraja. He was ruling Kalinga Nadu in a very just manner. He had no heirs. His wife and he therefore decided to pray to Lord Vishnu. One day Sukra appeared before the King and asked him to perform a yaga and assured him that by the time the yaga was compelted, Perumal would surely grant him his wish. Accordingly, the King performed the yaga. Out of the yaga kundam, the Lord appeared and gave him prasada. He advised him to give it to his wife and said that in due course she would definitely bear a child. Kalinga Raja acted accordingly. As promised, in course of time, his wife Kanthimathi gave birth to a son. The King named his son Kaveran. Kanthimathi desired to have a daughter also. One day Surya appeared in the dreams of the King and told him that the daughter of Surya by name Kalindhi would be born as the daughter of Kalingaraja. Surya continued that however the young girl on becoming an adult would be transformed into the river Yamuna. She would then flow and join the Ganga and become a holy river which would rid the sinners of their accumulated sins. Accordingly, in due course, Kanthimathi delivered a girl baby. Time passed by. The daughter grew up. She reminded them of the dream and the promise given by Surya. She said that she would become a river and that in due course her father and mother viz. Kalingaraja and Kanthimathi would also come to her banks and attain mukthi. When the daughter left them, Kalingaraja and his wife felt very sad. They started on a pilgrimage after entrusting the kingdom to Kaveran their son. In course of time, Kaveran got married and he had a daughter by name Lopamudra. She was also known as Kaveri as she was the daughter of Kavera. When she was of age, Agasthiya rishi came to the palace of Kaveran and requested the King to give Kaveri in marriage to him. Lopamudra agreed to marry the rishi. But she told him that after some years, she would become a river and at that stage, the rishi should bless her to become a holy river which would rid the devotees of all their sins. Agasthiya rishi agreed. After some years, Lopamudra became the river Kaveri. She wanted to become holier than Ganga. She undertook severe

penance. God appeared before her and told her that once in twelve years in the month of Masi, Bagirathi river will also join Kaveri, she will then be known as Akanda Kaveri. He also added that before the river joins the ocean, the waters of the Ganga with those of the Kaveri would merge for one whole day in Srirangam in Chandra pushkarini and for another whole day at Thirukkudanthai in Sankha theertham and for the third day in Pundarika pushkarini in Thillai Thiruchitrakutam. After co-existing for three days, the river would be known as Dakshina Gangai. This event would occur once in 12 years and that occasion would be celebrated as Mahamakham. All the devas and people will vie with each other to have a dip in the holy waters on that day and rid themselves of all their sins.

Meantime, Kavera Raja and his wife who undertook a theertha yatra after 12 years reached Chola Nadu. They met group of pilgrims going for Mahamakham. From them, they learnt about the greatness of their daughter Kaveri who had become a river. The King along with his wife went to the banks of Kaveri. Their daughter appeared in their dreams at night and advised them that if their desire to attain moksha was to be fulfilled, they should go to the Thillaivanam which was on the northern side of the Kaveri sangamam and they repeat the ashtakshara mantram and pray sincerely to Perumal who will fulfil their wish. Accordingly, the King and the Queen reached Thillaivanam. There God was pleased with their prayers and granted them their wish. It is said that God appeared before the King even as he was doing his sankalpam uttering the names Govinda Govinda. Hence when the Perumal appeared before the King, the King addressed Him as Gopvindaraja. Hence it is that the Perumal in His Archa form at Thillai Thiruchitrakutam is known as Govindaraja. In response to the prayers of Kavera Raja, God agreed to stay on in the same place and give dharshan to the numerous devotees.

Yet another story connected with this divya desam relates to the incident when Perumal acted as the Sabanayaka and watched the dancing contest between Siva and Kali. One day, in Kailasa, Lord Siva was lost in the admiration of the beauty of God Vishnu and the greatness of His qualities. Out of his

joy, Lord Siva performed an Ananda tandavam i.e. the dance of happiness. It is said that even while dancing with abandon, Siva followed the tenets laid down in Bharatha sastra for the dance steps. All the devas appreciated the dance. Seeing this Ambika also got a desire to dance along with Sankara. In course of time, the dance became a competition between the two as to who was excelling the other. They went to Satyaloka and asked Brahma to give the verdict. Brahma advised them to go to Thiruvallangadu, a place near Kanchipuram. He said He would give his verdict after watching the dance there. Accordingly, Siva and Parvati danced at Thiruvallangadu. But Brahma was not able to decide who between the two was better. Indra was also present. They decided that only Perumal in Tirupparkadal would be in a position to give a verdict. Accordingly, Gangadhara and Ambika went to Thirupparkadal. Achuta looked at them and said that He would watch their dance at Thillai vanam. He said that He would come there as Sabapathi and give a verdict.

Meantime, an asura by name Valan had been killed by Indra. The brother of that asura by name Valkali assembled a number of other asuras and had a pitched battle with the devas. He defeated the devas and virtually chased them out of Devaloka. Indra ran to Parkadal and fell at the feet of Apathbhandava and prayed to Him to help. Lord Vishnu advised him to go to Thillai Thiruchitrakutam. He said He would be shortly going there to watch the dance of Siva and Parvati. He said He would give Indra the necessary weapon at that place and help him to defeat the asuras.

Vishnu reached Thiruchitrakutam. He went to the Ratnasaba, sat on the throne shaped like Omkara asanam. Siva was also present at the Ratnasabai. He started his dance. Hearing the tinkling noise of the dancing bells, Parvati also came rushing. Perumal then laid down the rules for the contest. He said that the dance should conform to the rules prescribed in the Bharatha sastra and that each should repeat whatever was the dance mudra performed by the other. If any one of them failed to repeat the performance, He/She should accept defeat. Further, any violation of the Bharatha sastra principles will also result in declaration of defeat. Whoever was thus declared as

defeated would have to go and stay outside the city of Thiruchitrakutam. The contenders viz. Siva and Parvati agreed to those conditions. The tandavam started. The people were lost in admiration of the superb divine dance. It lasted for seven days. As the days progressed, the dance of Ambika was becoming more and more refined and beautiful. Siva realised this. He felt ashamed to be defeated by His wife. He appealed with His eyes to Perumal to spare him this shame. It is said that Perumal, out of pity on Siva and without the knowledge of the people seated in the sabha, gently lifted one leg and conveyed a hint to Siva to dance accordingly. Siva was quick to catch the point. He lifted His right leg and did Urdhva tandavam. Ambika, as the lady, fought shy of performing this acrobatic feat. Her failure to imitate Siva resulted in Siva being declared as the winner. Parvati was asked to go and stay outside the city as agreed to earlier. Accordingly, in the northern part of the town, a small temple was built and Thillai Kali is to be seen installed there even today. To assuage the hurt feelings of Parvati, Perumal assured Her that as Thillai Kali, She would be worshipped by many and that She would be a great giver of boons. Sankara was very happy with having been declared the winner. He assured Govindaraja that He would continue to stay in the same place and continue to perform the Ananda tandava dance in Thiru Chitrambalam and continue to worship Perumal. Hence it is that Siva known as Nataraja here continues to give dharshan to the devotees in His dancing pose by the side of the shrine of Lord Govindaraja.

At that time, Indra also came to Thiruchitrakutam. He reminded Devadi deva of His earlier promise to give him a weapon to defeat Valkali, the asura. Perumal accordingly gave him a weapon and it is said that as a thanks offering, Indra celebrated in the month of Vaikasi, a grand festival for 10 days. This story is related in Bavishyotra puranam in the 12th and 13th adyayams. It is also related in Vyagrapura mahatyam 14th adyayam and in Chidambara mahatyam adyayams 25 and 29.

Yet another story connected with this divyadesam explains why this place was known as Pundarikapuram. Pundarika rishi was the sishya of Narada maharishi. He had the habit of

visiting all the divya desams and whenever he came across a tank filled with lotus flowers, he would identify the lotus flower with Mahalakshmi and immediately pluck them and offer them to Narayana. Because of this, he used to be called Pundarikar. In the course of his travels, once he went to Srimushnam. He worshipped Bhuvaraha Perumal there and then went to Thillai Thiruchitrakutam.

There he plucked 100 flowers from the Tirupparkadal theertham at Thiruchitrakutam. He then heard an asareeri voice directing him to worship Lord Narayana with those 100 flowers. But the rishi could not find Lord Narayana anywhere near the Tirupparkadal theertham. He was worried that the 100 flowers that he plucked may wither with the passage of time. He then prayed to the Lord to rush to his rescue even as He helped Gajendra, His devotee who wanted to offer one lotus flower at the divine feet of Narayana. Even as he completed his sincere prayers, Lord Narayana appeared before him with His four hands and lying down in the Bhoga sayana pose on His divine couch Adishesha. Wonder of wonders the rishi saw that the God was wearing the 100 flowers which he had earlier plucked. Pundarika rishi was very happy and prayed to God to continue to give darshan in that pose to all the other devotees as well. God conceded his wish and said that as Pundarika rishi offered prayers here and had the divine vision, the place would thenceforth be also known as Pundarikapuram and that the Thayar would be known as Pundarikavalli and the pushkarini which was full of lotus flowers would be known as Pundarika pushkarini. Hence it is that even today, Thillai vanam is also known as Pundarikapuram.

Yet another story connected with this place explains why the place got the name Thillai. Once upon a time, two asura ladies by name Gilly and Dilly went to Sri Mushnam, prayed to Bhuvaragha Perumal. Bhuvaraga Perumal asked them to ask for any boon. Gilly then asked that in Srimushna kshetram where the Perumal had appeared in a swayam vyaktha form she would like to stand guard on the boundary of the temple and be permitted to worship the divine feet of the Lord for ever and ever. Varahamurthi granted that wish and Gilly was

accordingly permitted to guard the temple. Dilly asked that she be blessed to continue to stay in the presence of the Perumal. Bhuvaragan then blessed her and said that a little distance from Srimushnam, there was a place known as Pundarikapuram and asked her to have her bath in the Pundarika saras and do tapas. Dilly accordingly went to Pundarikapuram, had a bath in Pundarika saras, did deep penance. God came seated on Garuda and appeared before her. She then asked that she should become a beautiful tree which would give shade as well as scent and that the forest where she prayed should be known after her. God granted the wish and Dilly became Thillai ghandhara vriksham and continued to give divine fragrance. The place where she did tapas came to be known thenceforth as Thillaivanam. The Perumal who is located in that place came to be known as Thillai Govindan and Sankara who was dancing near His feet came to be known as Thillai Natarajan and Umadevi who participated in the dance against Siva came to be known as Thillai Mahakali and the sabha where the dance took place came to be known as Thillai Thiruchitrakutam.

It is also said that Kusa and Lava, the sons of Rama had a darshan of their father Rama in His pattabhisheka pose at Thiruchitra kutam. Once upon a time, Kusa and Lava were ruling Ayodya. They performed an aswamedha yaga. In that yaga, the horse is let loose and the entire area where it roams without any obstacle or hindrance or restriction is deemed to be the area over which the prince who performed the aswamedha yaga will have complete unquestioned suzerainty. It is said that the horse let loose by Kusa and Lava while performing the aswamedha yaga reached Thillai Thiruchitra kutam. The princes also had their bath in Pundarika saras and worshipped Govindaraja. They then prayed to Govindaraja to bless them with a vision of Rama and Sita in their coronation form. Govindaraja conceded their wish and He appeared before them as Chakravarti Thirumagan along with Sita and Maruti. In return, it is said that Lava and Kusa repeated Valmiki's Ramayanam and thus enabled God to hear His own story through the songs sung by His sons.

Let us now turn to another story. Once upon a time, a rishi by name Gopralaya muni did severe penance on the top of Meru

parvatham. His desire was to see the Lord as Krishna in His different leelas. In response to the prayers, God appeared before him and asked him to go to Thillai Thiruchitrakutam and offer prayers to Him there and He assured him that He would fulfil his wish at Thiruchitrakutam. Accordingly, the rishi went to Thillai, had his bath in Pundarika saras and prayed to Perumal. God is said to have appeared on 18 days in 18 different forms depicting the various Krishna leelas. Thus, one day the rishi had the good fortune to see Kalinga nardhanam, another day Poothana vatham, another day lifting the Govardhana mountain and on subsequent days in His Varaha roopam, Narasimha roopam, Trivikrama roopam, Parasurama roopam and Rama roopam. Having enjoyed all these different leelas, the rishi prayed to God to remain before him for ever as Venugopala with four hands and having Rukmini and Satyabama with Him. Hence it is that even today in Thiruchitrakutam, God in His archa form is seen as Venugopala with four hands and with Rukmini and Satyabama by His side.

Another interesting story connected with Thiruchitrakutam deals with the manner in which God rushed to the rescue of Ambarika rishi. Once upon a time, Ambarika Maharaja belonging to Surya vamsam was performing a yaga. The yaga cow was stolen by Indra. In the absence of the cow, the yaga could not be continued. The Raja therefore went to Thiruchitrakutam and on the banks of Nirjarai saras built a small temple. He installed the idol of Ranganatha and worshipped him. One day, it was Ekadasi. The King had observed the Ekadasi vratham and had fasted. The next day it was dwadasi. The King finished his prayers and was about to break his fast when Durvasa rishi arrived. He asked for food. The rishi also said that he would go, have his bath and return quickly before partaking of the food. In the meantime, Ambarika could not break his fast as the rules require that the athithi i.e. the guest should be fed first. Time was running out. The King was anxious to break his fast within the dwadasi gadia. He therefore took a sip of tulasi water so that symbolically he could treat it that the Ekadasi vratha was broken within the prescribed dwadasi gadias. Even as the King was sipping the tulasi water, Durvasa returned. He got annoyed and said that Ambarika Raja had committed a sin in having eaten

before the guest. The King was frightened. He fell at the feet of the rishi and prayed that as he had not partaken of the food and had only symbolically sipped the holy tulasi water with which he had washed the feet of the idol of Ranganatha, it need not be treated as a disrespect to the athithi. Even if it was a mistake, he prayed that he may be forgiven. The rishi was not pacified. He was about to curse Ambarika Raja. Ambarika then appealed to Ranganatha. Hearing this cry for help from His devotee God sent His chakrayudham to punish Durvasa. Durvasa tried to run away from the fiery Chakrat Alwar. He approached Indra for help. Indra and other devas could not help him. He went to Lord Ranganatha Himself and sought forgiveness. But God advised him to go back to Ambarika Raja and seek his forgiveness. Accordingly, Durvasa fell at the feet of Ambarika and sought protection. The generous King that he was Ambarika pleaded the cause of the Muni with his Lord. Thus, at Thiruchitrakutam, Ambarika rishi was helped by God to get over the anger of Durvasa.

One more interesting story connected with this divya desam relates to Adisesha. One day, Athri rishi was performing with folded hands his morning prayers on a tank bund. Suddenly, his concentration got disturbed as a small snake found its way into the folded hands i.e. the anjali hasta of the rishi. By his gnana drushti, the rishi knew that this small snake was Adisesha who had come to disturb his prayers. He was annoyed with Adisesha and he cursed that Adisesha be doomed to be born on earth. On hearing this curse, Adisesha repented for his childish prank and sought forgiveness from the rishi. The rishi said that having uttered the curse, he had no powers to withdraw the same. However, he advised Adisesha to go to Thiruchitrakutam on the banks of the Kaveri, have his bath in the pushkarini nearby and worship Perumal and that in due course, he would be redeemed. Thus, Adisesha became Pathanjali. Pathanjali means a person who fell down from the folded hands (anjalai hasta). Adisesha as directed continued to have his bath in the pushkarini and worshipped Perumal. In course of time, Perumal appeared before him and redeemed him. Adisesha requested that he be given the boon that he should never be separated from God and that when the God

lay down, he should be His soft couch and that when God sat he should be the umbrella over his head and that when God walked, he should be the foot-wear and the soft cloth that would be worn by the God. God granted these wishes. Even today, in Thiruchitrakutam, we see Adishesha standing with folded hands in the Govindaraja shrine. The tank where he had his daily bath is known as Sesha theertham.

Epigraphical Highlights:

The temple at Chidambaram is virtually a treasure trove of inscriptions. But one interesting feature is that while the history of the place goes back to the age of the Prabandhas and the devaram i.e. the Pallava times, there is no record of even the early Chola period on the walls of the temple. The earliest inscriptions refer only to the times of Rajendra Chola I and Kulottunga Chola I and later Kings.

A few of the interesting ones are given below:

An inscription outside the first prakara (east) has two sanskrit verses which praise the victories of Kulottunga Chola I over the five Pandyas and the Keralas. It says that he burnt the fort of Kottara near Cape Comorin and raised a pillar of victory on a peak of the Sahyadri ¹ mountains .

Outside the first prakara on the northern side there is a record of Korajakesarivarman alias Rajendra Choladeva I. It relates to the 24th year of his reign. This is the earliest record in the

temple. On the same wall, there are inscriptions which record several gifts to the God of Chidambaram by the daughter of Salukya Rajaraja I and younger sister of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottunga Choladeva I.²

Another inscription to the left of the entrance to the north gopuram of the Nataraja temple contains a record of the Vijayanagara King Krishnadevaraya (1509-30). It records the

¹ 1. 115 of 1888

² 118 and 119 of 1888 ARIE

building of the gopura.³

On the western wall of the second prakara of the Nataraja temple, there is a record in the 9th year of the Chola King Kulottunga Choladeva III. It records a grant of land to the temple by a certain Keralarajan for a flower garden. The inscription gives very minute fractions of Velis and land measures. It is therefore of great value to the historians of land tenure and revenue.⁴

There are number of inscriptions relating to the period of Pallava King Sakalabhuvana Chakravarti Kopperunjinga deva recording gift of lands for the temple.⁵

Another inscription on the eastern wall of the first prakara of the Nataraja temple records in the 17th year and 277th day of the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravarti Rajaraja deva, a gift of land belonging to the village of Pandur was made for maintaining a feeding house at Perumbarrapuliyur in Perumal Tiruveedhi.⁶

Yet another inscription records a gift of land for the offering called Tiruppavadai on the day of Pushya in the month of Thai to the God Aludaiyar.⁷

On the eastern wall of the first prakara of the Nataraja temple, there is a record of the Vijayanagara King Mahamandalesvara Sri Rangaraya VI which records that the King repaired the big mandapam in front of Thillai Govindaraja Swami shrine in Thiruchitra kutam, the gopuram of the shrine, the vimanas of the Goddess Pundarikavalli Nachiyar and Sudi kodutha Nachiyar and the mandapa in front of Tiruvali Alwan. He is also stated to have given rent free, five villages in which the Srivaishnavas were permanently living.⁸

³ 174 of 1892 ARIE

⁴ 457 of 1902 ARIE

⁵ 460, 462, 390 of 1903 ARIE

⁶ 266 of 1913

⁷ 267 of 1913

⁸ 271 of 1913

On the southern wall of the same prakara, there is a record of the vijayanagara King Achuta Raya Maharaya in S.1461 which says that the King ordered that the image of Thillai Govindaraja Perumal at Perumbarrappuliyur be set up according to the ritual of the vaikanasa sutra. He granted 500 pon which was the income from the four villages for the upkeep of daily worship.⁹

There are a number of inscriptions which record gift of land for providing lotus flowers to the God and for providing garlands to the various shrines of Gods and Goddesses.¹⁰

Another inscription relating to the period of the Pandya King Sundarapandyadeva records an order to the temple authorities remitting certain taxes on lands which had been originally granted for the maintenance of the servants of a flower garden belonging to the temple. The reason for the remission was that the said lands being close to the sea had become filled with sand and overgrown with weeds.¹¹

A record in the 8th year of the Pallava King Sakalabhuvana Chakravartin Kopperunjinga deva registers an order that Saliya merchants were to be provided with land for building their houses on condition that they would supply the necessary cloth for the parisattam of the God and the Goddess.¹²

There are certain inscriptions which also refer to the type of flower which shall be supplied to the God and Goddess. It says that the servants of the garden must supply malligai, nandiyavattai and iruvakshi flowers to the temple. Only when those flowers were not available, others had to be supplied.¹³

There are a number of inscriptions quoted in ARIE 1918 which refer to the times of the Marattas (dynasty) of Tanjore as also to the Pandya (dynasty) King Jatavarman and Pandyan

⁹ 272 of 1913

¹⁰ 284, 285, 287, 290, 292, 293, 300, 301, 302, 303 and 304 of ARIE 1913

¹¹ 289 of 1913

¹² 308 of 1913

¹³ 313 of 1913

King Maravarman and Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajaraja deva Chola which refer to gifts of land for supplying plaintains and other offerings to the Gods and the Goddesses in the temple.¹⁴

An inscription on the detached stone in a platform in front of the Govindaraja Perumal shrine in the Nataraja temple relating to the period of Rajendra Choladeva gives the description and weight of the jewels and utensils and provisions made for offerings to the God.¹⁵

Another inscription relates to Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottunga Choladeva which refers to gifts of money for offering to the deity.¹⁶

Another inscription found in the same place records gifts of land for offerings and special worship in the temple. In one place there is also a reference to a cell for storing camphor for use during worship.¹⁷

In the northern wall of the second prakara in the Nataraja temple, there is an inscription which registers that the garden endowed in the 15th year of Periodevar was found to measure 16 ma in excess and that the additional land also to be entered as belonging to the garden and the additional taxes assessed on the land be remitted.¹⁸

There are other inscriptions which also register orders exempting from taxes certain lands which are offered for service on several festive occasions to the God.¹⁹

There are a number of inscriptions in the western wall of the second prakara of the Nataraja temple which register remission of certain taxes due on some lands endowed for various

¹⁴ 545 to 549 of ARIE 1918 Appendix B

¹⁵ 610 of ARIE 1929-30 Appendix B

¹⁶ 611 of ARIE 1929-30 App.B

¹⁷ 612 of ARIE 1929-30 App.B

¹⁸ 103 of ARIE 1934-35 App.B

¹⁹ 104 & 105, 107 of ARIE 1934-35 App.B

services to the Gods in the temple.²⁰

A number of copper plates also detail the incidents that took place at Chidambaram. An interesting copper plate states that Chittambala yogin renovated the temple of Siva at Chidambaram and performed the kumbabishekam of the renovated Kanakasabai at the instance of Gopala Dadaji, an officer of the King. It states that the work of renovation was begun in the month of Dhanus of the year Sarvadhari and was completed in the month of Karthigai of the Raktakshi year. It also says that the deity commenced his dance in the Sabha in the year Kshaya. It also states that the kumbabisheka was performed by the kula guru Muthiya Dikshidar. Another copper plate states that Chittambala muni made golden parts and pillars wooden and copper plates for the gilded hall of Chidambaram.²¹

There is another interesting inscription on the eastern wall of the second prakara of the Nataraja temple relating to the Chola King Rajakesarivarman Kulottunga I. It records an endowment of 80 kasus paid into the treasury by Rajendra Chola Anantapalan. Out of this amount, a sum of 10 kasu was paid towards purchase of land from the Nagarattars for a flower garden named after the donor and for feeding the devotees and the balance of 70 kasus was invested to yield 30 kasus per annum.²²

There are a number of inscriptions which records lands for digging and maintaining an odai for supplying the temple daily with flowers and for feeding the tapasvins and for maintaining nandavana for the temple.²³

There are a number of inscriptions which refer to gifts of lands for meeting the expenses towards offering to God for an abishekam on the day of the Pandyan Kings natal star every month and in several other services on specified occasions.²⁴

²⁰ 1,3,4,6,7,8,10 of ARIE 1935-36 App.B

²¹ 20,21,22,23 of ARIE App. A 1946-47

²² 317 of 1958-59 ARIE App. B

²³ 319 to 324 ARIE 1958-59 App.B

²⁴ 325 to 329 ARIE 1958-59 App.B

In the third prakara mandapa to the north of Subramanya shrine near the western gopuram, there is an inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan King Jatavarman Sundarapandyan I. It records the details of the organisation of a Saraswati Bhandaram and a grant for maintaining and expanding the same. The said Saraswati Bhandaram seems to have been established by one Swami devar. it enumerates the names of 20 sholars employed in the above Bhandaram and who were engaged in writing down the various grantas.²⁵

Yet another relates to the Pandyan King Tribhuvana Chakravartin which records the grant of land for the maintenance of several persons employed in the Saraswati Bhandara Library mentioned in the above inscription. That library is said to have contained manuscripts arranged to be copied down by Swami Devar.²⁶

In the third prakara of the same Nataraja temple, southern wall, there is an inscription relating to the Pandyan King Maravarman Virapandyan. It refers to allotting some buildings from the temple property for residential purposes to the nagarattar who in return had to supply to the Gods and Goddesses parivattam on the days of Bharani in the months of Aippasi and Chithirai.²⁷

Hymnology:

There are all told 32 pasurams sung in praise of the deity here. Kulasekhara Alwar and Tirumangai Alwar are the two Alwars who have sung in praise of the Lord here. The former has written 11 pasurams and the latter 21. In the following paragraphs, one pasuram sung by Kulasekhara Alwar vis. Pasuram No. 10-1 from Perumal Tirumozhi and Pasuram No.3-3-6 from Peria Tirumozhi of Tirumangai Alwar are quoted along with the meaning.

²⁵ 168 ARIE 1961-62 App.B

²⁶ 169 ARIE 1961-62 App.B

²⁷ 171 ARIE 1961-62 App.B

Perumal Tirumozhi 10th Tirumozhi 1st Pasuram

Poem:

அங்கண் நெடுமதிள் புடைசூழ அயோத்தி என்னும்
அணி நகரத்து உலகனைத்தும் விளக்கும் சோதி
வெங்கதிரோன் குலத்துக்கோர் விளக்காய்த் தோன்றி
விண் முழுதும் உயக்கொண்ட வீரன் தன்னை,
செங்கண் நெடுங் கருமுகிலே இராமன் தன்னைத்
தில்லைநகர்த் திருச்சித்ர கூடந் தன்னுள்
எங்கள் தனி முதல்வனை எம்பெருமான் தன்னை
என்று கொலோ கண் குளிரக் காணும் நாளே

Meaning:

On when will that day dawn
When I can see at Thiruchitrakootam Rama
Who has eyes red in colour like the petals of a lotus flower
Whose body is of the same hue as an enchanting dark cloud;
Who is the brightest jewel of Surya vamsam;
Who brightens the entire world from the famous Ayodhya
full of beautiful clouds;
Who impressed the entire world as a great warrior?

Thirumangai Alwar Peria Tirumozhi 3-3-6:

Poem:

எய்யச் சிதைந்தது இலங்கை மலங்க வரும்ழைகாப்பான்
உய்யப் பருவரை தாங்கி ஆநிரை காத்தான் என்றேத்தி
வையத் தெவரும் வணங்க அணங்கெழுமாமலை போலே
தெய்வத் புள்ளேறி வருவான் சித்ரகூடத்துள்ளாளே.

Meaning:

Oh sing in praise of the divine qualities of this Perumal
Who when born as Rama let loose an arrow and destroyed
Lanka;
Who as Krishna held aloft the Govardhana mountain and
saved the cows, calves and the people at Gokulam from certain
destruction due to the severe rain that lashed the place for
seven long days;

This Lord is seated on Garuda the huge bird which looks like a mountain.

He is at Chitrakutam.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108 Tirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

அடியால் உலகெல்லாம் அன்றளந்து கொண்ட
நெடியானைக் கூடுதியேல் நெஞ்சே! - கொடிதாய்
குத்திர கூடு அங்கி கொளுந்தா முன் கோவிந்தன்
சித்திரகூடம் கருதிச் செல்.

Meaning:

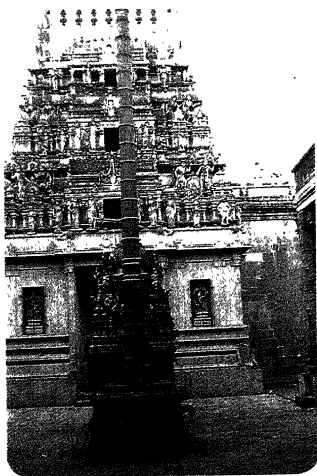
Oh mind of mine

If it is your desire to attain the lotus feet of the Lord who as Trivikrama assumed a gigantic form and measured all the worlds with His three steps.

Then before this body filled with evil thoughts and deeds gets burnt by fire.

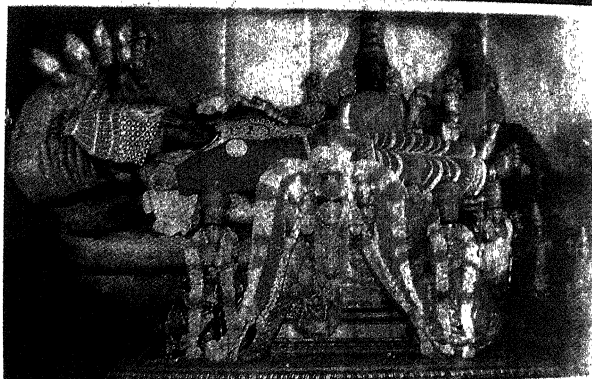
Go to Chitrakutam where Govindaraja Perumal resides.

* * *



Thiru Chitrakutam - Temple Gopuram

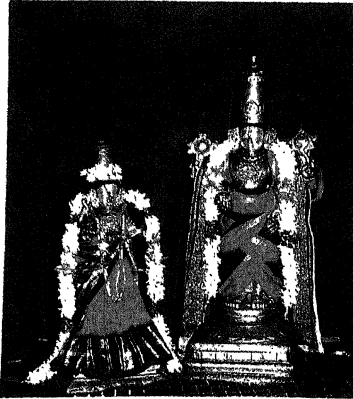
Thiru Chitrakutam Govindarajaperumal Moolavar & Utsavars



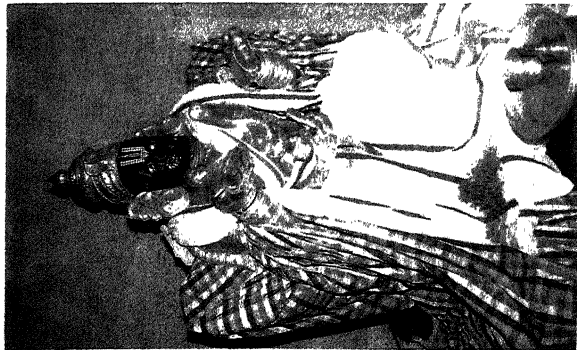


Thiru Chitrakutam Govindarajaperumal Utsavamurthis

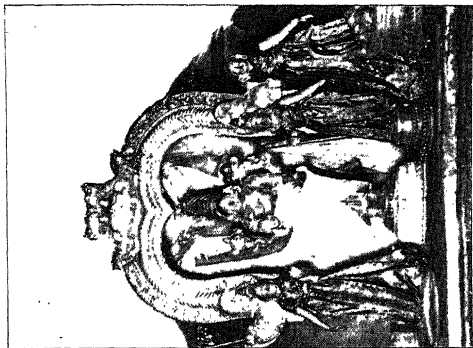
Thiru Naraiyur - Utsavamurthis



அ/யி சீனிவாசப் பெருமாள்
வஞ்சுகளவள்ளி
நாகச்சியார்கோயில்



Thiru Naraiyur - Sri Kal Garudan



Thiru Naraiyur - Utsavamurthis

THIRU NARAIYUR (NACHIYAR KOIL)

This is one of the divya desams in Chola Nadu in Tanjore District. It is situated about five miles from Kumbakonam on the Kumbakonam Tiruvarur road. This temple is more popularly known as Nachiyar Koil. The moment the word Nachiyar koil is mentioned, the devotees immediately will refer to the Kal Garuda sevai i.e. the Stone Garuda utsavam. Normally, the vahanam of God is made either of wood or wood plated with gold or silver. But in this case, the vahanam is made out of stone. Hence its unique nature.

This place is surrounded by a number of important temple towns. To the south about three miles away is Tiruchcherai (Saranatha Perumal Koil) divya desam. To the north about three miles away is Thiruvinnagaram divya desam (Oppiliappan koil). To the west about six miles away is Nandipura Vinnagara divya desam (Nathan koil). To the southwest, about five miles away is Thirukudanthai divya desam (Sarangapani temple).

This place is also surrounded by famous saivite temples on all the sides. To the east about two miles away is Koogoor, a famous saivite sthalam. The north is Siddhiswaram and north-east about 1.5 miles away is Thirupparaithurai. Northwest is Alagapuri Sivasthalam. Closeby is Sakkottai which is famous for its shrine for Lord Ganesa.

The place is known as Srinivasa kshetram, Thirunaraiyur, Sugandhavana kshetram, Nambiyur, Manimada kovil, Siddhi kshetram, Pancha vyuha sthalam, Dwadasakshara kshetram. It is known as Sugandha giri. The word is from sanskrit and it means sweet scented hill. The place is known as Thiru Naraiyur (Thiru + Narai + Ur). Thiru means holy, Narai is sweet scent and Ur means place. Thus, Sugandagiri in Sanskrit as well as Thiru Naraiyur in Tamil mean one and the same.

It is known as Nambiyur after the name of the Perumal here who is known as Nambi. It is called a Pancha vyuha sthalam as God manifested Himself in five forms and is seen in His five forms in the garbagriha. It is known as Manimada Kovil because the temple is structured in such a manner that it

looks like a tiered structure. When one stands at the entrance to the gopuram, one can see the magnificent idol of the moolavar standing as it were on the top of a small hillock. This madakovil i.e. tiered structure is a peculiar feature of the temples built by the Chola king Kochchenganan.

The moolavar is known as Thiru Naraiyur Nambi as also Srinivasa or Para Vasudeva. He is seen in a standing posture facing east with only two hands. The Thayar is known as Vanjulavalli. She is seen standing along with the moolavar in the garbagriha itself. Both the Thayar and the Moolavar are seen in the Thiru kalyana kolam. There are five theerthams here. The most famous is Mani muktha nadhi theertham. The others are Aniruddha theertham, Pradhyumna theertham, Samba theertham and Shankarshana theertham. The sthala virukshams are vilva maram i.e. Bael tree, arasa maram i.e. peepul tree, Vanjula maram i.e. (Vanjula tree). God is believed to have appeared in this place in response to the prayers of Medhavi rishi, Brahma, Vayu, Surya and the Chola king Kochchenganan.

There are a number of special features associated with this divya desam. The first rare characteristic is the idol of Pakshi Raja. Pakshi Raja here is regarded not merely as a vahana. He is regarded as a deity and pooja is performed to him daily. The idol of Garuda is located in a separate shrine. It is situated a little further down from the garbagriha on the northern side of the Maha mandapam. The sannidhi is about 10.5' square. The stone idol of Pakshi Raja is said to be of salagramam. It is made of a single stone nearly 8' high and 5'x5' at the base. A special sweet known as Amudha kalasam is offered as neivedhyam to Garuda. This amudha kalasam is a round shaped sweet like the modakam (kozhukattai) offered to Lord Vinayaka. Garuda here is therefore known as Modaka Modar. He is considered to be a great vara prasadhi. As he helped Perumal in searching and locating Mahalakshmi who had left parama pada earlier due to a pralaya kalaham, God is believed to have specially rewarded Garuda in this place by making him very powerful and effective.

The Perumal is taken in a procession twice in a year seated on this stone Garuda. One is in the month of Margazhi on

the 4th day and the other is in the month of Panguni again on the 4th day. The peculiar inexplicable fact is that when this stone idol is moved out of the sannidhi into the mandapa, four persons are able to lift him; but later as the idol moves with the utsava vigraha on it, each end which was lifted by one person previously, slowly needs four, later eight and finally sixteen. Thus, the stone vahanam initially lifted by four people is later carried by sixty four people. There is no explanation as to how and why the same Garuda becomes heavier as the divine procession progresses round the streets of this temple town.

Another peculiar feature of this pilgrim centre is that the paramapada vasal which in all vaishnavite temples is on the northern side is facing south in this temple.

Yet another unique feature is that there is no separate sannidhi for the Nachiyar. Goddess is seen along with the moolavar in the garbagriha. She is standing on the right side of the God. It is said that in no other divya desam do we see the Goddess standing along with the Perumal in the moolasthanam.

The utsava vigraha of Srinivasa Perumal also has only Vanjula valli Thayar by his side. In this divya desam, there is only one Nachiyar with the God and She gets precedence over the Perumal in all respects. Usually Bhoodevi and Sridevi will be standing on either side of the utsava vigrahas, but this is missing in this holy spot. What is more interesting is that the utsava Thayar is seen standing about 3" ahead of the utsavamurthi Perumal. Even when the Kal Garudar procession is taken round the streets, the Goddess riding on a silver Hamsa vahanam precedes the Garuda vahanam of the Perumal. It is said that this priority given to Nachiyar is because of the boon obtained from Perumal by Medhavi Rishi, the foster father of Nachiyar. Is it any wonder that this place is well known more as Nachiyar koil rather than as Thiru Naraiyur? In Tamil, this place is referred to as Pen Arasu Nadu. Literally translated this means it is a kingdom where the lady rules. Honours are first given to the Goddess. Neither is there any separate shrine for Andal here.

The vimanam i.e. the temple tower on the garbagriha is known as Srinivasa vimanam. It is in the shape of a gopuram. The only other place where such a vimanam is seen on the top of the garbagriha is at Parthasarathy Swamy Koil at Triplicane, Madras.

This place is one among the twelve swayam vyaktha kshetras. The other 11 being Tirupparkadal, Srimushnam, Thiruvaram, Thiruvengadam, Salagramam, Vanamamalai, Pushkaram, Badriksramam, Naimisaranya, Vadaaram and Dwaraka.

The greatness of this divya desam is related in Brahmanda puranam in a dialogue between Sounaka rishi and Brighu Maharishi (chapters 1 to 11 in Srinivasa kshetra mahatmyam). In the Bhavishyottra puranam also, the glory of this place is related through the Brahma Narada samvadam.

Once upon a time, Lord Vishnu was in His yoga nidra in Parama Padam. Due to a pralaya kalaham, Mahalakshmi got angry with the God and decided to leave parama padam. Accordingly, accompanied by Sarasvati and Savithri, She left parama pada and came to Sugnatha kshetram in Sugantha vanam. In Sugantha kshetram, there was a great rishi by name Medhavi. He was doing intense tapas to Sriman Narayana. His one and only wish was that Perumal should become his son-in-law and Thayar should become his daughter. One day, he was offering his prayers on the southern bank of Mani Muktha nadhi. He felt that there was an unusual bright effulgence and a feeling of holiness in the area. In the distance, he saw a vanjula tree. Underneath the tree, he saw a small girl standing. He approached her and asked her who her parents were and from where she had come and whether she had lost the way. The girl replied that she was not aware who her parents were and that she was alone in this world. She requested the rishi to adopt her and bring her up as his daughter. The rishi felt that this was a gift of God in response to his prayers. As he found her under a vanjula tree, he named her Vanjulavalli, took her to his asram and brought her up as his daughter.

Meantime, in parama padam, Perumal woke up from Yoga nidra. A number of devas had come rushing to Him and said that they were losing their power and the asuras were giving them a lot of trouble. Perumal said that all this was because of the absence of Thayar by His side. He decided to search for Her in the earth. He manifested Himself into five different human forms (Pancha vyuha forms) as Shankarshanan, Pradhyumnan, Aniruddhan, Samban and Purushothaman. As Shankarshanan, He decided to search for the Thayar on the eastern direction. As Pradhyumnan, He took to the southern direction. As Aniruddhan, He took to the western direction. As Samban, He took to the northern direction and as Purushothaman searched the entire central part. Besides, He asked Garuda to fly in the skies and try to locate the Goddess.

In course of time, Perumal Vyuhas reached Sugandanyam. The rishis there saw these five divine figures. They felt that these were not ordinary mortals. They took them to the asram of Medhavi rishi. The rishi welcomed them and offered Athithi pooja. In the meantime, Perumal saw Garuda hovering in the skies in the same area. He realised that the Thayar was residing somewhere in this area only. The Perumal therefore asked the maharishi that as per his vow, only a young girl should pour water to wash his hands before taking his meals. Medhavi rishi immediately called Vanjulavalli from inside the asramam and asked her to do all the honours to the guest. On seeing Vanjulavalli, Perumal recognised Thayar. As Vanjulavalli was pouring the water on the hands of Perumal, Perumal is said to have caught hold of Her right hand. Taken aback, Vanjulavalli shouted for help to her father - the rishi. The rishi came running and saw this transgression from the prescribed right behaviour by the guest. He was angry. He took some water from his kamandalam, wanted to splash it on the guest and curse him for his alleged misbehaviour. Perumal realised that his leela had gone too far. He therefore revealed to Medhavi rishi His true form and enlightened the rishi that Vanjulavalli was none other than Thayar. The rishi was very happy as he realised that his one and only wish to have the Thayar as his daughter and Perumal as his son-in-law was fulfilled.

Perumal asked the rishi to choose his boon. The rishi prayed to Perumal to continue to stay in the same place and give dharshan to all devotees. The rishi also desired that in this kshetram his loving daughter should be given precedence over even the Perumal. Perumal agreed to this also. The rishi wanted to celebrate the wedding of Perumal with Vanjulavalli and then attain moksham.

God granted all the prayers of the rishi. Savithri and Sarasvati who had accompanied the Goddess from Parama pada to earth seeing the turn of events went to Satyaloka and told Brahma and the other devas about the forthcoming celestial wedding at Sugandaranya kshetram. Brahma came to Thiru Naraiyur and prayed to God to bless him and permit him to worship Perumal and the Thayar in this kshetram. God granted this request. Hence it is that even today in the garbagriha we find the idol of Lord Brahma in the moolasthanam along with the five manifestations of Perumal.

Another interesting story connected with this divya kshetram relates to an incident in the life of the Chola king Kochchenganan. This king was a very just king. He ruled his people with affection. One day, he decided to do gaya sraddha to his forefathers. He and the queen proceeded to Gaya and performed the sraddha meticulously as per the prescribed procedures. In the meantime, his enemies, the Chera and the Pandya kings took advantage of his absence from the kingdom. They attacked the kingdom and occupied it. Thus, when the Chola king returned, he found that he had lost his empire. He fought with the enemies, but he was no match for them. He and his wife therefore retired to the forest.

He reached Srinivasa kshetram in Suganda vanam. The rishis there welcomed him. They provided food and shelter to him and the queen. They advised him to pray to Perumal in the temple. The king sat on the southern banks of the Mani muktha nadhi and offered sincere prayers to Para Vasudeva. In course of time, God was pleased with his prayers. He appeared before him and asked him as to what was his desire. The king related the story of his defeat and his desire to regain his

kingdom. Perumal directed him to take his bath in the Mani Muktha nadhi. He said that from the river, a sword will be presented to him. He should take that sword and then fight with his enemies. He assured him he will regain his kingdom. Accordingly, the king had his bath in the Mani Muktha nadhi. A brilliant sword arose from nowhere from the middle of the river. He received it. Suddenly, from nowhere a horse also appeared. The king got on to the horse, took the sword and fought with the enemies, vanquished them and regained the kingdom. As a thanksgiving measure, he offered a lot of land, precious jewels etc., to the temple. He celebrated a great utsavam which was attended by Devas. This festival was celebrated for nine days in the month of Visakam (Sukla paksham pournami thithi). Even today, this festival is celebrated in the temple.

Yet another incident connected with this divya desam is associated with the life history of Thirumangai Alwar, the great vaishnavite saint. It was here that Thirumangai Mannan was initiated into vaishnavism and the mudra abharana ceremony was performed by none other than the Perumal himself to Thirumangai Mannan.

The story of Thirumangai Mannan and how he became a famous Alwar are well known. It is sufficient if here we recapitulate only certain relevant parts in the life history of the vaishnavite saint. Thirumangai Mannan wanted to marry Kumudavalli. She agreed to marry him provided he would feed thousand vaishnavites every day for a period of one year. Thirumangai Mannan fulfilled this wish even by waylaying rich persons near Thirumanam Kollai and by diverting the taxes which he had collected in his area as a chieftain. Once when the king came to know about this misappropriation of tax collections, he was furious. He put him behind the bars inside the temple itself. Even today, the devotees are shown a place in the temple where Thirumangai Mannan was said to have been imprisoned in those days. When Thirumangai Mannan was lying in the prison, Perumal appeared in his dream and told him that a sum equal to the money that was diverted by him would be found concealed in the bed of the river Vegavati near Kanchi. God asked him to reclaim that money and render unto Caesar what belongs to

Ceaser. Thirumangai Mannan acted accordingly. Thus, it was that Thirumangai Mannan got his release from the prison.

Thirumangai Mannan then prayed to Perumal to make him a vaishnavite so as to enable him to cross the last hurdle before marrying Kumudavalli. Perumal agreed to become his guru. Alwar therefore refers to the Perumal as his Nambi i.e. his guru. The idol of the Perumal in the garbagriha is seen with its two hands holding the sankhu and chakra in a position as if the Perumal is about to imprint the shanku and the chakram on the shoulders of his disciple and perform the samasrayam ceremony. Srinivasa Perumal of this place henceforth came to be known more popularly as Nambi.

The Theerthams:

As stated earlier, there are five theerthams in this place. Each has got a story of its own to relate. The most famous theertham is the Mani muktha nadhi theertham. Originally, this was a river. But in course of time, the river dried up and only the tank is in existence today. It is believed that once upon a time, when Garuda was carrying vairamudi (diamond crown) from Tirupparkadal so as to adorn the head of Thirunarayana Perumal at Thiru Narayanapuram at Melkote near Mysore, a few of the precious stones and pearls fell into this river. That explains the origin of the name of this river as mani (precious stones) mutha (pearls) nadhi (river).

Once when Kaveri river and the other holy rivers approached Brahma for advise as to how to rid themselves of the sins left with them by the various devotees, Brahma advised them to go to Mani muktha nadhi, mingle with the waters of that river and thus become pure. This mingling of the rivers is believed to take place in the month of Margazhi during Sukla paksham.

Long ago, it is said that Sun God lost his hands as they got caught in his own wheels as he was driving on the sky. He approached Bruhaspathy for a solution for regaining his hands. He was advised to go to Thiru Narayur, the siddhi kshetram.

Accordingly, in the month of Chittirai, on dwadasi day, the Sun God had his bath in Mani muktha nadhi and prayed to Lord Narayana and Srinivasa of Thiru Naraiyur granted his wish and the Sun God regained his hands.

In the southwest corner of this Mani muktha nadhi theertham, there is a neer nochchi (Vanjula tree). This is said to be the original tree under which the Thayar was sighted by Medhavi rishi when he was having his bath in the Mani muktha nadhi.

Aniruddha Theertham:

This theertham lies about two furlongs away and to the east of the temple. It is believed to have been built by Perumal in His manifestation as Aniruddha. Durvasa maharishi had cursed Indra when the latter did not give sufficient respect to the maharishi and had in his blinding egoism put the garland given by Durvasa rishi on the head of the elephant Iravatham. Not realising the value of that garland, Iravatham had pulled the garland down and trampled it under its feet. Angered by this sacrilege Durvasa cursed that Indra should lose his entire kingdom. To atone for this sin, Indra approached Brahma who advised him to go to Srinivasa kshetram in Sugandaranyam and do severe penance on the banks of Aniruddha theertham. He did so and attained the grace of God. Indra is said to have planted on the bund of this tank in the southeastern corner an asvatta viruksham (arasa maram - peepul tree). Even today, there is a peepul tree on the banks of this theertham.

Pradhyumna Theertham:

To the south of this temple, about one furlong away lies Pradhyumna theertham. This bears the name of one of the manifestations of the Perumal in this divya desam. It is said that Vayu Baghavan did deep penance on the banks of this theertham. He planted a big banyan tree on this bank. This can be seen even today.

Another interesting story is related in connection with this theertham. Long ago, at a place known as Mahishmathi, lived

a brahmin by name Banudattan. He was a great vedic scholar. But one day, due to his ahamkaram (i.e., exaggerated ego), he did not show sufficient respect to his guru. The guru cursed him and Banudatta became a demon. He roamed the forest, eating the wild animals. In course of time, he reached Pradhyumna theertham. He was thirsty. He collected the water of the theertham in the palm of his hands. The moment the water touched his hands, his sins got washed out and he regained his human form.

Samba Theertham:

To the west of this kshetram about two furlongs away is Samba theertham. It is said that once upon a time, the saptha rishis stayed on the banks of this theertham. They have planted a nelli tree (goose berry tree). This is there even today.

Shankarshana Theertham:

This is about four furlongs to the north of the kshetram. This was created by Perumal in his manifestation as Shankarshanan. Lord Siva who plucked one of the five heads of Brahma and thus committed Brahmahatty had his bath in this theertham and was relieved of his dosha. It is also believed that Vayu Baghavan prayed to Lord Srinivasa on the banks of this tank.

Epigraphical Highlights:

There are certain stone inscriptions found in the temple precincts. A few are extracted here.

A slab built into the wall of the mandapa in the Vishnu temple relating to the Tanjavur Naik kings - Raghunatha - Nayaka (Saka 1540) states that the mandapa was built by Attavanai Rangappayyan for the Goddess Nachiyar Amman.¹

On the southern wall of the central shrine of the Srinivasa Perumal at Nachiar Koil, there is an inscription which relates to the Pandyan king Jatavarman Tribhuvana Chakravartin Sundarapandia Deva. It registers a sale of land by a native of Man-

¹ Ins. No. 286 ARIE 1927 Appendix B

alpakkam in Melur Nadu, a sub division of Jayankondan Chola mandalam to the temple of Ulaguyyaninrarulina-Emberum(an) in Thirunaraiyur in Tirunaraiyur-nadu.²

On the left wall of the outermost gopuram of the same temple, there is an inscription relating to Krishnadeva Maharaya, Vijayanagara dynasty S.1436 which registers the assignment of certain specified taxes by the king for the benefit of the God Nambi, His consort and Sri Rama of Tirunaraiyur in Cholamandalam at the request of Vadamalai-Annagal of Arigandapuram in Tondaimandalam.

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar initiated into vaishnavism by the Perumal here was very prolific in singing pasurams in praise of the Lord here. He has sung 110 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of his pasurams with its meaning is given below:

Pasuram: .

உறியார் வெண்ணையுண்டு உரலோடும் கட்டுண்டு
வெறியார் கூந்தல் பின்னைபொருட்டு ஆன் வென்றானார்
பொறியார் மஞ்சை பூம்பொழில் தோறும் நடமாட
நறுநான் மலர்மேல் வண்டு இசைபாடும் நறையூரே.

Meaning:

Oh Krishna

To keep the freshly churned butter beyond your reach the damsels used to store it in a vessel, hung with a rope from the ceiling, but yet you mischievously and, on the sly ate that butter.

To punish you for that Yasodha tied you with a rope to the mortar and you allowed yourself to be so tied up! To win the hands of the damsel with scented hair viz. Nappinai you even fought with seven oxen. You, Krishna, are residing at Thirunaraiyur - where the peacocks dance and the bees are sweetly humming as they alight on the freshly blossomed flowers.

² Inscription 132 ARIE 1931-32 App.B.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar
108 Tirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

செய்ய சடையோன் திசை முகத்தோன் வானவர்கோன்
 ஐய மறுத்து இன்ன மறியாரே - துய்ய
 மரு நறையூர் வண்டுழாய் மாயோன் செவ்வாயோன்
 திரு நறையூர் நின்றான் செயல்.

Meaning:

How can we mere mortals understand the great deeds and actions of the Perumal of Thiru Naraiyur?

The Perumal who wears the gentle scented tulasi garland -
 The Perumal who is famous for His astounding acts and unequalled qualities;--

The Perumal whose mouth has the enchanting, bewitching colour and beauty of a lotus flower - When Even Brahma who emanated from His navel and Even Siva who stays on the right side of Perumal and Even Indra the Lord of the devas have not been able to comprehend fully the significance of the acts and utterances of Perumal!

* * *

THEREZHUNDUR

This is yet another divya desam in Tanjore District. It is near Mayavaram. It is also known as Radha Magna Puram. The moolavar is known as Devadirajan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. To his left is Garuda and Kaveri Thai. The idol of Kaveri Thai is seen in a semi- kneeling posture (mandi itta pose). To the right of the moolavar, there is an idol of Prahladha. The moolavar holds in His left hand the mace which is slightly resting on the ground. The utsavar is known as Aamaruviappan. The unique feature of the utsava murthi here is that the idol of the Utsavar is seen along with the idols of a cow and a calf. It is only in this divyadesam that the utsava vigraha of Lord Krishna is seen along with Rukmini, Satyabama, the cow and the calf. Further it is not in many places that one sees Krishna with four hands as it is seen in this place. The Goddess is known as Sengamalavalli. The pushkarini is known as Darsana pushkarani. The vimanam is Garuda vimanam. God appeared here to Uparisaravasu, Kaveri and Agastiyar.

This is one among the Pancha Krishna kshetrams. These Pancha Krishna kshetrams are Tirukkannapuram, Tirukkannangudi, Tirukkannamangai, Kapisthalam and this place viz. Therezhundur.

Literally and structurally analysed the name of this place in Tamil viz. Therezhundur is evolved out of two words viz. Ther + Ezhundur. Ther means ratham. Ezhundur means destroyed. Ratha Magnapuram in Sanskrit also conveys the same meaning. The sthala puranam of this place is mainly connected with the story of an arrogant king and his ratham and the way he was humbled.

Long ago, there was a king by name Uparisaravasu. He did penance to Lord Brahma and obtained from Him a boon to the effect that none can defeat him and that even his chariot would be supreme and there should be no hurdle even to the shadow of his ratha irrespective of whether it travelled on earth or in the sky! Having obtained this boon, the king thought that

he was invincible. One day he and his queen were travelling in the sky in their chariot. They saw the beautiful temple of Aamaruviappan on the ground. The queen expressed a desire to worship the Perumal in the temple. But the king in his arrogance not only denied the request, but in fun added that all the objects on which the shadow of his chariot fell in that area should be destroyed. At that time, on the ground, a number of cattle were grazing. As the shadow of the chariot fell on those cows, they were destroyed. Perumal who saw all these, decided to teach a lesson to the arrogant king. Garudalwar who was nearby the Perumal pressed with his toes the shadow caused by the ratham on the ground. As a consequence, the ratha itself got pulled down from the sky and fell into the pushkarini thus unceremoniously throwing the royal couple into the tank. The king and the queen swam ashore from the pushkarini. They saw Agastiya rishi seated on the banks of the pushkarini and praying to God. The king thought that Agastiya rishi may be connected with his fall. He therefore asked him the reason for their falling into the tank. Agastiya rishi, with his gnana drusti knew that this was an act of the Perumal. The rishi advised the king to shed his arrogance and he requested him to go and seek the help of Perumal. The king went to the temple. Instead of seeing the Perumal in his silky pithambaram (robe) with Shanku and Chakra in either hands, he saw a small cowherd boy wearing a dirty cloth with the traditional turban of the cowherd loosely tied on His head. The cowherd boy was surrounded by other small children. The king had not yet lost his arrogance. He wondered as to how this lowly cowherd boy and his unkempt set of urchins could help him - a great king - in bringing out his mighty ratha. The Perumal sported a knowing smile on His lips as He read the thoughts passing through the king's mind. However, as desired by the rishi, the king asked the cowherd boy and His friends to help in pulling out the ratha submerged in the pushkarini. The cowherd boy promised to help but in return asked the king to give him and his friends thousand vessels full of freshly churned butter. The king as in the case of Mahabali Chakravarthi got taken in by the small and insignificant gift that was requested. He readily agreed. He ordered the retinue which had followed him to collect thousand vessels of freshly churned butter before that evening and give

it to the cowherd boy. But Lo and behold however hard the retinue tried, they could collect butter only to fill 999 vessels. They could not find butter for completing the promised thousand vessels. Even at that stage, the king had an evil thought in his mind. He felt that when he was giving thousand vessels, if one vessel contained mere water, it would not be noticed by the cowherd. He therefore filled up one vessel with mere water and gave the thousand vessels to the cowherd boy. The Lord decided to teach a lesson to the king. When the vessels were placed before him, the cowherd chose to open only that vessel which was filled up with water by the king. But it was the king who was in for surprise as when that vessel was opened, it was not filled with water but was filled with butter. The cowherd boy went on to open the other vessels. They were all filled with water and not butter. The king realised that the cowherd boy was not an ordinary child. He realised also the serious mistake which he had committed. He fell at the feet of the cowherd and sought forgiveness. The Lord along with Goddess Lakishmi appeared before Uparisaravas, in all His glory. The king then told the God that while he was only a king among the mortals, Perumal was the king among the devas. It is said that this was the reason for the Perumal here being known as Devadi Raja. As requested by Uparisaravas, the Perumal continued to stay at Therezhundur and give dharshan to the numerous devotees who throng to that place.

It is rather unusual to see an idol of a cow and a calf along with the utsavamurthi vigrahas as in this place. There is a story connected with this phenomenon. It is believed that once upon a time, Siva and Vishnu were playing a game of dice. Parvati was the observer. As is well known, Parvati, besides being the wife of Siva, is also the sister of Vishnu. The game was won by Mahavishnu. Siva got angry and felt that the observer had not been impartial and unbiassed and that she had given the decision in favour of her brother rather than her husband. In his anger, he cursed that Parvati should become a cow and roam about on earth. Even Parvati could not escape the curse of Lord Siva! Vishnu felt bad as He was the cause of the misfortune to his sister. He therefore decided to look after Her even when she was a cow. He also descended to the earth and the cow and

the calf seen with utsavamurthis are said to be none other than Parvati herself.

Meanwhile Siva also felt bad at having lost his temper. He also descended to Therezhundur disguised as a brahmin repeating the vedas and guarded His wife while She was roaming about in the fields. Siva in this form is known as Vedapuriswarar and there is a temple for Vedapuriswarar in Therezhundur itself. Thus Aamaruviappan i.e. Vishnu as the brother and Vedapuriswarar i.e. Siva the husband are said to be guarding Parvati while She is undergoing her curse as a cow on earth. This story is repeated even today while offering pooja to Vedapuriswarar.

There is yet another story to explain the appearance of the idol of the cow with the utsavar. This is also related in the puranas. It is said that Krishna as Kannan was looking after the cows at Gokulam. One day Brahma enticed these cows and brought them over to Therezhundur hoping that Krishna will follow his favourite cows. When Krishna baghavan came to know about this, He then created other cows so that Gokulam was not deprived of its cattle population. Brahma then realised His mistake. He asked for forgiveness from Krishna and as proof of that forgiveness prayed to God to come to Therezhundur and stay along with the cows which Brahma had brought over from Gokulam. It is said that that is why Lord Krishna is known as Aamaruviappan in this place, Aa in Tamil meaning cow. So the Lord who looks after the cows is aa maruvi appan. To lend credence to this theory, the utsavamurthi of Lord Krishna is seen here with two icons, of a cow and of a calf.

An intriguing feature in this temple is that there is no idol of Garuda, though the story is that it was Garuda who pulled down the radha by stepping on the shadow thrown by the radha on earth. There is no explanation given for the absence of Garuda vigraha in this temple.

Earlier it was related how Lord Siva had appeared as Vedapuriswrar in Therezhundur. Another small story which links these two temples viz. the temple of Devadiraja and the

Vedapuriswarar temple is also worth narrating. It is believed that one day Perumal appeared before Vedapuriswarar in His Rama avataram. Even today, the day on which Lord Rama had appeared viz. Panguni Punarvasu day, the utsavamurthi of Aamaruviappan is dressed up as Rama and is taken up to the temple of Vedapuriswarar in Therezhundur.

God is said to have appeared to Agastiya maharishi also in this divya desam. Once upon a time, in a place known as Villiyanallur near Therezhundur, two demons by name Villavan and Vatapi were residing. These two demons adopted a novel way of capturing unsuspecting human beings and eating them. Everyday, they would invite one person to their house for food. One of the brothers viz. Vatapi would be killed and served as a meal to the guest by the other brother Villavan. After the unsuspecting guest had his fill, Villavan would call Vatapi to come before him wherever he was. Immediately, Vatapi would tear open the stomach of the guest and come out in response to the call of the brother. Thus, each day, one guest would be killed and the brothers had their fill. The people in the town came to know of this. They approached Agastiya rishi and asked him to find a solution for this. Agastiya rishi took pity on the residents. He decided to teach a lesson to the demons. The next day he went as a guest to the house of Villavan, the demon. The usual procedure took place. But with this difference that as soon as Agastiya rishi ate the food, he touched his stomach with his hand and uttered the words "Vatapi Jeernobhava" i.e. to say that he ordered that Vatapi be digested. Not knowing this, as usual, Villavan called out for Vatapi. But nothing happened. Vatapi could not come out as he had already been digested by the rishi. Villavan realised his folly. However, the rishi also felt sad. He thought he had committed a sin in playing a game on the demons. To atone for it, he is said to have observed severe penance to Devadiraja Perumal in this place. In course of time, God appeared before him and blessed him. As proof of this story, even today, an idol of Agastiya rishi is seen in the northern side of the mahamandapa in the temple.

It is believed that Markandeya rishi also did deep penance to the Lord here and then attained moksha. To remind us of

this incident, in the garbhagriha itself, an idol of Markandeyar is seen.

The presence of the idol of Kaveri matha in the garbhagriha has an interesting story behind it. Once upon a time, Agastiya maharishi is said to have requested Kaveri to marry him. She refused. The rishi then imprisoned her in his kamandalam. Lord Vinayaka who was watching this decided to help Kaveri. When the rishi kept the kamandalam, with Kaveri imprisoned in it, on the ground, Vinayaka took the form of a crow, dashed against the kamandalam and pushed the kamandalam down. Immediately, the water from kamandalam started flowing eastwards at a fast pace. The rishi got angry at seeing Kaveri fleeing from his kamandalam. He cursed that the region through which she flowed should cause a lot of hardship to all the people residing in that area. Kaveri felt sad that because of her, the innocent people should suffer. She therefore started praying to Perumal Devadirajan. In course of time, God appeared before her and blessed her. Hence it is that the idol of Kaveri is seen in the garbhagriha in a suplicating pose with one leg folded and another kneeling on the ground (mandi itta pose).

This town is also the birth place of the great Tamil poet Kamban. In the temple, to the left of the dwajasthamba, there is a sannidhi where idols of a man and that of a woman can be seen. It is said that these idols are those of Kavi Chakravarthi Kamban and his wife. About a furlong from the temple, there is a big raised open space. It is about 15' in height. It is referred to even today as 'Kamban Medu' i.e. Kamban heights. A few years ago, the Archaeological Depttment conducted excavations around this Kamban medu and discovered gold and copper coins. Out of these three copper coins and one gold coin are displayed in the temple office even today. In the month of Panguni, when the Hastha star is in the ascendant, the Kamban festival which lasts for three days is celebrated with a lot of fanfare by the Aamaruviappan koil authorities. Kamban also, out of an understandable attachment to his birth place, referred to this place in his Kamba Ramayanam in Yuddha Kandam Nagapasa Padalam when he uses the following words:

“அழித்த தேர் அழுந்தா முன்னம்
அம்புடன் கிடந்து வெம்ம”

He uses these words while describing the incident when Naga pasam was let loose and Indrajit suddenly disappeared in the sky. In these words, he describes the sthala story of his birth place in an veiled manner.

This town is also connected with the incident in the life history of Tirumangai Alwar. In the course of his pilgrimage, once Thirumangai Alwar reached Therezhundur. As soon as he entered the town, he asked the poeple the name of the presiding deity in the temple. On hearing that the name was Devadirajan, the Alwar thought that it was a temple for Lord Indra, who was the king of the devas. He therefore did not visit the temple. But decided to pass through the town. Perumal realised the mistake. He wanted the Alwar to sing a few pasurams in His praise. He therefore decided to use His maya and have a small leela of His own. The Alwar who was passing through the town suddenly felt that his foot had become like lead, heavy, almost as if he was tied down with chains and he could not take one step forward. Alwar thought that it was the work of evil spirits. These thoughts which passed through the mind of the Alwar are expressed by him in his own pasuram as follows:

தந்தை காலால் பெருவிலங்கு தாள்விழ நள்ளிருட்கண்
வந்த எந்தை பெருமானார் மருவி நின்ற ஊர் போலும்

Later the Alwar realised that this was God's way of making him re-trace his path and visit the temple. To make up, as it were, for his initial unintended neglect, the Alwar has sung 45 pasurams here in praise of the Lord.

Epigraphical Highlights:

There is an inscription built into the base of the gopuram in Aamaruviappar temple. The inscription is in Tamil. It refers to an undertaking given by the Sivabrahmanas of a temple in respect of the sale of a land.¹

¹ Ins.No. 562 of ARIE 1970-71 APP.B

Yet another inscription is found on a stone fixed into the wall on the first prakara on the northern side of the temple. Again this inscription is in Tamil which records that one Enaip-perumal of Nallavadaikkangayam gifted the tall rampart wall of the temple and that this gift was made at the instance of Periya-Tiruvengada Jiyar. ²

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has composed 45 pasurams in praise of the deity here. One of his pasurams viz. Peria Thirumozhi 7-5-4 with its meaning is given below:

வெள்ளததுள ஓராலிலைமேல் மேலி அடியேன் மனம்
புகுந்து என்
உள்ளத் துளளும் கணனுள்ளும் நின்றூர் நின்ற ஊர்போ-
லும
புள்ளப பிளளைக கிரைதேடிப் போன காதல் பெடை-
யோடும
அளளல செருவில் கயல்நாடும் அமியார் வயல்கூழ்
எழுந்தூரே.

Meaning:

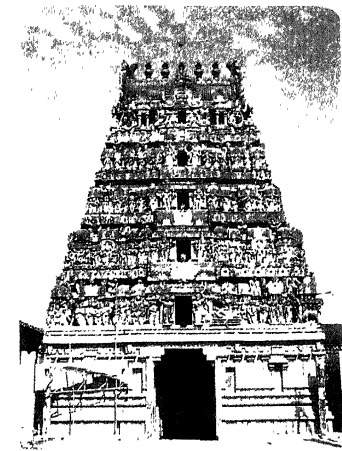
Therezhundur is the divya desam of the God who during the pralaya slept peacefully on a banyan leaf, later entered my heart and is staying for ever in my eyes and heart and I have place for none else there. Therezhundur is also the place where though the fields are full of big sized fishes, yet the father and mother birds with affection search for the tiny fishes to feed their little ones.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108 Andadi:

Poem:

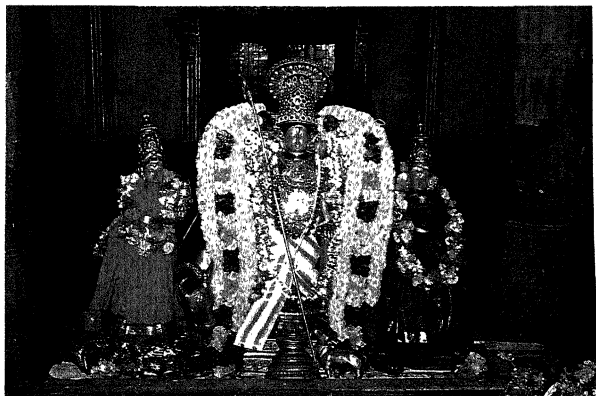
அடியாராய வாழ்வின அறிவிலாபர் பேயக்கள
டெயார் வினையனத்தும் தீரும் - முடிவில்
செழுந்தூரத்தன் எனினும் செங்கண்மால் எங்கள்
அழுந்தூரத்தன் அணியனாம்.

² Ins. No.563 of ARIE-1970-71 APP.B

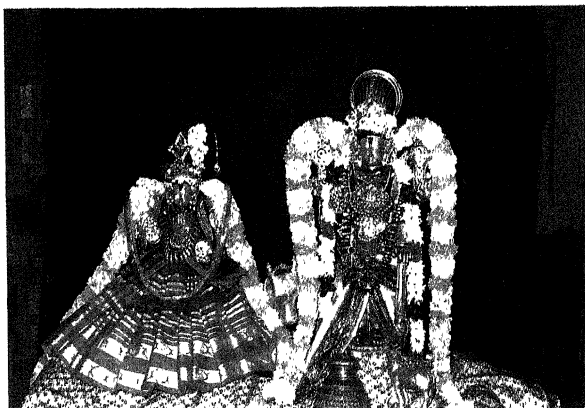


Therezhundur - Gopuram View

Therezhundur - Sri Aamaruviyappan



Sridevi & Bhoomidevi Utsavamurthis



Therezhundur - Sri Aamaruviappan
& Sengamalavalli Thayar - Utsavamurthis

Therezhundur - Sri Aamaruviappan - Utsavamurthi



Meaning:

O Ye men! out of your crass ignorance you are leading the life of mad demons

Please become ardent devotees of the Lord and attain supreme bliss.

All your troubles which are now thick like a well grown tree with numerous branches, will disappear when you approach God the Almighty.

Tho! You may now think that the Lord with eyes like lotus petals residing at Therezhundur is very far away, yet when your end nears, He will appear before you and will bless you and wish you well.

* * *

THIRUKKANNAMANGAI

This divya desam is five miles to the west of the famous pilgrim centre of Thiruvavarur in Nannilam Taluk in Tanjore District. It is about 15 miles from Thiruchennai and 25 miles from Kumbakonam. The presiding deity here is known as Bakthavatsala Perumal. He is also known as Bakthar Avi Perumal. As the very name signifies the God here is said to have a lot of vatsalya i.e. affection towards bakthas i.e. devotees. He is known as "Aavi" that is soul of the Bhaktha. The moolavar is known as Perumpurak kadal. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The moolavar is nearly 14 feet high and looks very majestic. The moolavar Goddess is known as Tirukkanna Mangai Nayagi, the utsavar Goddess is known as Abisheka Valli. The sthala viruksham of this place is makizha maram. The vimanam is Utpala vimanam. God is said to have appeared here to Varuna and Markandeya rishi. About one mile to the south of this place is Odampokki river and to the north about one mile away is Viruddha Kaveri river now known as Vettaru. The two rivers flowing by the side of this divya desam places it in the same category of divya desams as Srirangam where the river Kaveri encircles the divya desam.

The antiquity of this temple can be inferred from the fact that this is mentioned in the Skanda puranam. The mahatmyam relating to this place is mentioned in Padma puranam 5th kanda 81st to 87th adhyayams. The sthala purana is reported to have been told by Sutha pauranika to the rishis residing at Naimisaranya. This shrine has all the seven essential features of a temple. Hence it is also known as Saptanmrutha kshetram. The essential features are kshetra (locality), theertha (sacred tank), mandapam (collonade), vimanam (tower on the sanctum sanctorum), natam (river), nagaram (town), aranyam (forest). Literally translated Saptanmurutha-kshetram is shrine of seven nectars.

It is believed that Perumal celebrated his panigrahanam i.e. marriage with Goddess Lakshmi after she took her bath in the tank. Hence the kshetram is known as Sri Krishna mangala kshetram and the Goddess is known as Sri Abisheka Valli. As

Mahalakshmi is said to have stayed in this place, did severe penance, the forest around this place is known as Lakshmi vanam.

In the moolasthanam, there are no inner walls shutting out air and light. Hence the various sculptures around the sanctum can be very clearly seen. In the moolasthanam statues of Markandeya rishi as well as Varuna are seen in a posture where they have folded their hands and are leaning on one bent knee (Mandi itta baani). On the surrounding walls of the garbagriha, all the devas who came to witness the divine wedding as well as the Saptha rishis and Lord Siva are seen.

The idol of Pakshi Raja viz. Garuda has got special importance here. He is seen with folded hands and is very popular here as a definite granter of boons to devotees. He is known as a vara prasadhi. Every Sunday, there is a thirumanjanam for Pakshi Raja. When his birth star is in the ascendant i.e. Swati, a special thirumanjanam is performed. The neivedhyam offered to Pakshi Raja is known as amrutha kalasam. It is very sweet and the devotees who are able to get that prasadam consider themselves as very fortunate.

On the inner side of the Perumal sannidhi, there is a big mandapam which is known as Sri mandapam. This mandapam is standing on four pillars. It is believed that it was at this mandapam that the divine marriage of Sri Bakthavatsala Perumal and Abishekavalli Thayar took place.

It is well known that Lord Brahma emerged out of the Vishnu's navel. Lord Vishnu entrusted him with the four vedas. But one day in Satya Loka when Brahma was sleeping, the two demons Mathu and Kaitapa stole the vedas and hid them deep in the ocean. When Brahma awoke, he realised the seriousness of the loss and was very upset. He rushed to meet Vishnu at Thirupparkadal. But he was told by the Dwaraka palakas there that God along with Mahalakshmi was residing at Thirukkanna mangai. Brahma rushed to Thirukanna mangai. He sat on the northern side of the pushkarini there and started a severe penance. God was pleased with his sincere penance, appeared

before him, killed the demons and restored the vedas. Lord Brahma then requested God to continue to stay at Thirukkanna mangai for ever and requested that He also should be seen along with the Perumal at this place. God granted him this wish. Brahma converted the four vedas into four pillars which are said to be the four pillars holding up the Sri mandapam today.

A striking sight in this temple is a huge hive of honey bees near the shrine of the Goddess Abisheka Valli. This hive is said to have been in existence for many ages. According to the legend, it is believed that Maharishis and Devas in large numbers came to attend the panigrahanam (celestial marriage) of the Lord with the Goddess. Those who came to witness the marriage wanted to stay on in the same place and enjoy the divine sight of the kalyana thirukkolam (the wedding scene of the divine couple). God granted their wish. Hence the Devas and the Rishis became bees which are continuing to stay even today in the hive in front of the sannidhi of Goddess. It is an inexplicable fact that in spite of so many bees humming around the hive, not a single devotee has been stung by any one of the bees. Daily prayers are offered to the bee hive also and the pilgrim who throng to this temple city never fail to witness this ceremony.

The theertham here is known as Darsana pushkarini. There is a legend connected with this name. It is well known that Perumal assumed Thrivikrama form to humble Bali Chakravarthi. At that time, Perumal covered the entire earth with one foot and placed the other foot covering Satya loka. Lord Brahma then washed the foot which encompassed the Satya loka. The water that was used to wash the foot spilled over to the earth. It is believed that God put his pressure on the toe of the first foot which had covered the entire earth and then lifted the second foot which covered Satya loka. The pressure of the toe of the first foot covering the earth caused a dent and a hollow in that place. This hollow became a tank. Into this hollow flowed the water which spilled after Brahma washed the second foot. Hence it is that the water in this tank is considered as more sacred than the water of river Ganges. This pushkarini is also known as Vishnu pathagangai. This pushkarini is today known as Darsana pushkarini. Darsana meaning "to look at",

pushkarini means holy tank. It is called darsana pushkarini as even the mere sighting of the pushkarini is believed to rid one of one's sins! There is a story which justified this claim. It is believed that once upon a time, the Moon God had misbehaved with his guru-pathini Tara and had a son through her known as Budha. The other Devas were very angry with the Moon God for having committed this heinous sin of Guru talpam. They cursed him. The Moon, as a consequence, started waning. He approached Brahma. He related his problems. Brahma pitied him and told him to atone for his sin by going to Saptamrutha kshetram and to take a holy bath in the holy pushkarini and pray to Bakthavatsala Perumal. He assured him that in course of time, Perumal would bless him and redeem him from his sin. Accordingly, Moon reached Thirukkannamangai. He just had a darsan i.e. looked at the pushkarini. Immediately, he felt he was relieved of his sin. Hence it is that this theertham got the name Darsana pushkarini. This story is repeated in Skanda puranam as well as in Tiruvarur mahatyam.

It is believed that even today Lord Siva guards the eastern side, Brahma guards southern side, Bakthavatsala Perumal western side, Vinayaka northern side and the central part of the tank is guarded by Lord Muruga. Besides this the eight directions of this pushkarini are being guarded by the following rishis: Vasishta, Vama devar, Javali, Kasyapa, Parasara, Vyasa, Visvamisra, and Ashtavakra rishis.

Yet another interesting story connected with this shrine relates to the life of the great devotee and disciple of Nathamuni who resided in the precincts of this temple, cleaning and sweeping the prakaras and performing the other services without even caring for his regular food and drink.

The name of this disciple is Kannamangai Andan. One day two people came to worship Bakthavatsala Perumal with their dogs following them. The two dogs started fighting with each other. They got hurt and started bleeding. Seeing this, the owners got annoyed and they started fighting with each other. Thus, the fight between the animals got transformed with a fight between the humans viz. the owners of the dogs.

Kannamangai Andan who was watching all this was able to see a great truth and philosophy even in this minor incident. He felt that just because one's dog got hurt, the men lost control over themselves and in order to protect their charges were even willing to punish and fight with the other person. If this was the reaction of a human being for the sake of his animal which he fed and brought up, he wondered as to how much more of affection and sense of protection and responsibility the great Lord will have towards all of us, who are all His creations. He realised that God will surely watch us, guide us and be with us while we are travelling through this samsara sagaram. This gnanam attained by Kannamangai Andan at this place made him give up his normal life. From that day, the jnani never bothered about his food, he went to the temple, took his position near the second gopura vasal. He thought he was a faithful dog of the Perumal and started rendering faithful service to the Lord. He just ate whatever the devotees who came to the temple offered him. He used to engage himself even in minor pieces of work like removing the grass that grew wildly in the prakaram. One day one of the pilgrims who saw this great man doing this menial job, rather sarcastically asked him whether the path to parama padam is assured only by removing the grass in the prakara. Thirukannamangai Andan just ignored the sarcastic question, but put on a beatific smile and asked the questioner whether the place which was cleared of the grass did not look more pleasing to the eye and beautiful than the place which had not yet been cleaned. He said that the place which was cleaned was beautiful to look at and thus was a source of joy to many, whereas the other looked unkempt and repelling. He said that any activity which brought a smile to another person's face was good enough to assure an entry to parama padam. Thus, he said that an activity which brought paramanandam to another would definitely help in ensuring a place in parama padam.

One day as the Nithyanushtana goshti was rendering prayers in the temple, suddenly the devotees saw the figure of a speeding dog rushing towards the garbagriham. They were agitated. They chased that form. But Lo and behold they saw that as the shape of the dog reached the garbagriha it became a flame, a jyoti and merged with the Perumal. This jyoti was

believed to be the soul of Thirukannamangai Andan the faithful devotee, the great disciple of Nathamuni.

In the Thiru Unnazhi prakaram, there are a number of beautiful sculptures. Some of the beautiful sculptures are exquisitely carved stone images of Kalinga narthanan, Lakshmi Narasimhan, Vamanan, Parasuraman, Hiranyasamharamurthi, Balaraman, Kothandaraman, Venugopalan, Brahma, Paramapadanathan, Gajendra varadhan, Saraswati, Bhoovarah, Navaneethakrishnan etc. Usually, whenever we think of Adishesha, immediately in our mind's eye we think of Adishesha only in the form of divine couch with God lying on it. In this place, there is a sculpture of Paramapadanathan seated on Adishesha with its hood spread like umbrella over the head of the Lord. These pieces of sculpture are beautiful pieces of art, nay of eloquent poetry in stone. Just outside the Perumal sannidhi, on the wall there is also a sculpture of Buddha with folded (anjali) hastam.

Epigraphical Highlights:

A copper plate found in this temple says that a descendant of Thirumalai Nayakar of Madurai by name Raja Manya Rajasri Achuta Vijaya Raghunatha Nayakar in the year 1608 gifted 60 velis of nanjai land to meet the expenses towards performing the pooja and neivedhyam to the Perumal.

There is also another inscription which says that in 1621 A.D. renovation work was undertaken in this temple and the Bakthavatsala Perumal's mahapradishtai was celebrated with great pomp and splendour. This is found on a stone inscription in Thiru Unnazhi prakaram.

On the door jamb to the left of the front gopuram is entrance of Bakthavatsala Perumal temple, there is an inscription regarding abolition of all taxes and dues on the lands belonging to the temple of Pattaravi Perumal at Thirukkannamangalam according to an order of Pallikondaperumal Piravadevaraya Malavarayar.¹

¹ Inscription No. 74 ARIE 1946-47 APP.B.

On the western wall of the inner gopuram of the same temple, there is an inscription which states that Bhandarattar of the temple of Pattaravi Perumal at Thirukkannamangai sold to Kandadai Ramanujayyengar, three taligais of three kurunis of temple prasadam per day in perpetuity for the maintenance of a feeding house (Ramanujakutam) for 40 pon paid by him to the Bhandaram.²

On the western wall of the central shrine of the same temple, there is a sanskrit verse in the Grantha and Tamil which records the consecration of the image of God Bhaktaprana (Bhaktavatsala).³

On the west and south walls of the same shrine is a carving relating to the king Achyuta Vijayaraghava Nayaka and it records the gift of 15.5 velis of land for meeting the expenses of running a feeding house (Ramanujakutam) for conducting worship and offerings and for repairs to the temple of God Bhaktavatsala Perumal of Thirukkannamangai.⁴

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has composed 14 pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One such pasuram with its meaning is stated below.

வெஞ்சினக் க ளிற்றை விளங்காய் விழக் கன்று
வீசிய ஈசனைப் பேய் மகள்
துஞ்ச நஞ்சு சுவைத்துண்ட தோன்றலைத்
தோன்றல் வாளரக் கன்கெடத் தோன்றிய
நஞ்சினை அமுதத்தினை நாதனை நச்சு
வாருச்சி மேல் நிற்கும் நம்பியைக்
கஞ்சனைத் துஞ்ச வஞ்சித்த வஞ்சனைக்
கண்ண மங்கையுள் கண்டு கொண்டேனே.

² Inscription No. 77 ARIE 1946-47 Appendix B

³ Inscription No. 78 ARIE 1946-47 Appendix B

⁴ Inscription No. 79&80 ARIE 1946-47 Appendix.B.

Meaning:

I saw
 To my heart's content
 with my own eyes
 At Thiru Kannamangai
 That Lord -
 Who had destroyed the angry elephant Kuvalaya peedam
 Who threw Vatsasuran on to the Vilatree -
 Who drank with relish the poisoned milk offered by the demoness Poothana and also sucked her life out in the process-
 Who was born to destroy Ravana -
 Who is my master and is as sweet as nectar -
 Who never deserts those who trust Him -
 Who cleverly cheated Kamsa and killed Him.

**Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's Poem
 from 108 Tirupathi Andadi**

with its meaning is also given below

Poem:

கருத்தினால் வாக்கினால் நான் மறையும் காணு
 ஒருத்தனை நீ நெஞ்சே! உணரில் - பெருத்தமுகில்
 வண்ணம் அம் கை கண் கால் வனசம், திருவரங்கம்
 கண்ண மங்கை ஊரென்று காண்.

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine
 If it is your wish to see the matchless one who is beyond
 all comprehension through thoughts, words or even mastery
 over vedas -
 I will tell you about Him.
 Listen -
 The colour of His body is that of the enchanting dark rain-
 bearing cloud -
 His beautiful hands, eyes and holy feet are like the lotus
 flower;
 He belongs to Srirangam and Thiru Kannamangai.

Musicology:

It is of great interest to note that all the features of this interesting shrine have been mentioned in the kirthana "Bhakthavatsalam" composed by Sri Muthusamy Dikshithar in the Raga Vamsavati. The song with its meaning is given below:

Raga Vamsavathi - Adi Tala

Pallavi:

Bhakthavatsalam Abhishekavalliyulam Bhajeham nityam

Anu Pallavi:

Bhakthimatam chitta pratyaksham pakasasanadi
Suradyaksham Bakthi-mukthi Pradayaka dakeham
Bhoosuradi akilajana samraksham (Bhaktha)

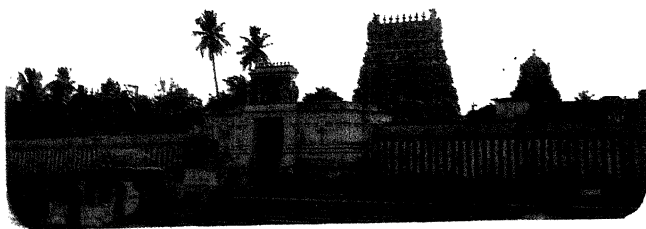
Charanam:

Dasakrutim Krishnamangalakshetra pathim
Lakshmivivahotsavam
Visala veda sagara mandapam
Virajaeya Mahavibhava prabhavam
Vishistadvaita pratipadyam viroopaksha
guruguha samvedyam
Visesha pala pradam vidhi
dunta nivrutti kavam munijana priyakaram
Sasanka Guru talpadosha
Hara darsa pushkarini
Tata pachima bhage subobhitot
Palavataka sthitham Suramaya
Madhumakshika radhitham

(Bhaktha)

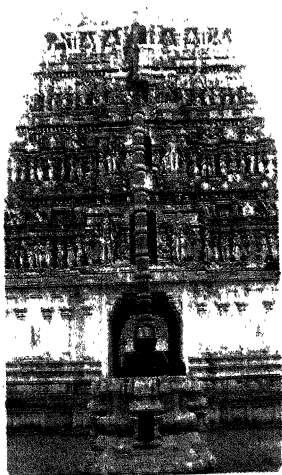
Meaning:

I worship Lord Bhakthavatsala everyday who is always with his consort Abhishekavalli Nachiyar, who is accessible to the eyes of his Bhakthas - (devotees,) who is the head of Indra and other Devas who gives (Ihparasukha) - pleasure in this world and in the other world - to Narottama and others, who took ten Avataras - (manifestations,) who abodes in Krishnamangala kshetra - a holy place known as Tirukannamangai which is situated north of Tiruvarur who gives his



Thirukkannamangai - Temple View

Thirukkannamangai - Gopuram View



Thirukkannamangai - Utsavamurthis





Thirukoodalur - Temple View

Thirukoodalur - Utsavamurthis



darshan - (presence) with Lakshmi's wedding (vivaha), who is situated in the mandapa - hall known as Vedaśagara, who is situated opposite to the sannidhi - (sanctum sanctorum) of Lord Garudazhwar who is known as Pakshiraja - king of birds, who is the swarupa or manifestation of the Visishtadwaita philosophy propounded by Sri Ramanuja, who is well understood by Lord Siva who has three eyes, who protects everyone from their karma - (past deeds,) who resides in the "Kuvālaya peeta" which is situated in the west of the holy tank "darsa pushkarani" which is considered as to have destroyed the Mahapataka (evil deed) of Chandra - the Moon, who married Tara who is known also as Udatti, the wife of his Guru - teacher Bruhhaspathi, who still protects the honeycomb which is situated at his Garbagruha - sanctum sanctorum itself as the bees are supposed to perform the kainkarya - work for the divine and good causes from very long time to Lord Bhakthavatsala.

* * *

THIRU KUDALUR (Aduthurai Perumal Koil)

This is one amongst the divya desams in Chola Nadu. It is about 12 kms. from Tiruvaiyaru on the Tiruvaiyaru-Kumbakonam road. The moolavar is known as Vaiyam Katha Perumal i.e. Jagat Rakshakan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east with a prayoga chakra in His hand. The Utsavar is also known as Jagat Rakshakan, but He holds a sengol i.e. a sceptre in His hand. This 'stick' is said to symbolise His role as the Ruler of the world. Goddess is known as Padmasini as also Pushpavalli. The theertham is Chakra theertham and Kaveri nadhi. The vimanam is Suddha Satva vimanam. The place is also known as Sangamuga kshetram.

Amongst the various divya desams visited by Thirumangai Alwar, there are only two places which have the names Kudal. One is Then Thiru Kudal i.e. South Thiru Kudal which is otherwise more popularly known as Madurai. The other Kudal is Vada i.e. North Thiru Kudal which is the divya desam under description in this chapter. This is on the banks of the river Kaveri. The temple here is more popularly known as Aduthurai Perumal Koil.

It is said that this place got the name Kudalur as in this place the devas along with Nandaka Munivar and other rishis joined to worship Perumal. In Tamil, the word joined is referred to as 'kooda'. Hence it is that this place got the name Koodalur i.e. the town where the devas and rishis came and worshipped Perumal jointly.

There are a number of stories connected with this divya desam. The stories are told in Brahmanda puran in several chapters.

The first story is with King Ambarisha and his generosity and qualities of devotion. It is said that once Durvasa rishi wanted to test the King's religious faith. He met the King on a dwadasi day. He wanted to see whether he could make the King break his dwadasi vratham. When the rishi met the

King and asked him to give him food, the King readily agreed. Usually on the day preceding Dwadasi i.e. Ekadasi people fast. It is broken the next day during the Dwadasi gadia. The rishi promised the King that he would go up to the river, have his bath and come back to partake of the food. But he delayed his bath. In the meantime, it looked as if the dwadasi gadia would be over. The King was anxious not to partake of the food until and unless he had fed his athithi i.e. Durvasa rishi. But at the same time, he was anxious not to allow his Ekadasi vratha to remain incomplete. He had a discussion with the ministers and they said that there was nothing wrong if instead of regular food, he could symbolically break the Ekadasi fast by sipping tulasi water and thus reap in full the benefit of Ekadasi vratha. The King agreed. Even as he was sipping the tulasi water, Durvasa appeared on the scene. He got angry and he said that the King had committed the sin of having taken his food even before the guest was fed. All the pleadings of the King with Durvasa were of no avail. He was about to curse Ambarisha. Ambarisha then appealed to Perumal. Perumal is said to have released His Chakrayudham on Durvasa rishi. Durvasa ran away from the fiery chakra. But the chakram chased him wherever he ran. He appealed to Indra, Brahma as well as to Perumal. But all of them finally asked him to go back to Ambarisha and seek his forgiveness. Durvasa returned, fell at the feet of Ambarisha seeking forgiveness. The King interceded on his behalf with Perumal.

One day as Ambarisha was doing his dyana on the banks of the Kaveri, he saw an ant hill. Strangely from the ant hill, he got a whiff of a beautiful divine fragrance. It upset his dyana. He wanted to explore this unusual event. He reached the ant hill. Suddenly he saw a small boy with an effulgent form. He asked the boy his name. The boy replied that in that ant hill Sarvaloka Saranyan i.e. the Protector of the world viz. God was hidden in His archa form. He said that everyday Devas were coming in huge numbers and worshipping Him with beautiful scented Parijatha flowers. The boy added that as he knew the King was Hari baktha and Hari dasa, he wanted to pass on this information to the King. He also said that as per the orders of Sriman Narayanan, the King should build a temple there and

worship the Perumal. The boy then disappeared. The King was nonplussed with this strange communication. That night in his sleep God appeared and said that He was pleased with his tapas and that He had chosen him as the vehicle for making available to the world a beautiful archa form of Himself. He asked him to do thirumanjanam to the chakram which attacked Durvasa rishi earlier. Perumal continued that Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers have joined in that place and he should use the water of that river for performing thirumanjanam to the chakram. He asked Ambarisha to build a temple in front of a tank with the idol facing east. The next day Ambarisha went and explored the ant hill and as expected a beautiful vigraha of Perumal was found. He built a temple and used to perform festivals to the Perumal in that temple throughout his life. As this is the place where Ambarisha built the temple and installed the Perumal God is also known as Ambarisha Varadhan. As He was born to protect the entire world, He is also known as Vaiyam Katha Perumal which in Tamil means the Protector of the Worlds. The Goddess here was seen in a slim and tender form like a clinging tendril. She was named by Ambarisha as Poongodiyal. In Tamil, it means a person who is slim and delicate like a tender flower creeper.

In the meantime, the rishis who were performing a yaga wanted to decide as to who amongst the Trinity was the fittest person to receive the Havis. Brighu Maharishi was selected to decide the fittest person amongst the Trinity. Brighu went to Satya loka, Kailasam and Vaikuntam. He was not received properly either in Brahmaloaka or in Kailasam. In Thirupparkadal he saw Lord Vishnu lying down with His eyes closed. Even Vishnu had not noticed him as soon as he arrived. In a fit of anger, Brighu kicked the God on His chest. Goddess Mahalakshmi who is always seated on the chest of Vishnu felt hurt that God should have allowed this insult to occur. But Vishnu was not perturbed. He caught the feet of Brighu and only asked whether his foot was hurt. Immediately, the rishi felt ashamed. He however realised that this God who had replied to his heinous act with nothing but gentle words was the greatest amongst the Trinity. At the same time, he felt ashamed of his egotistic act. He asked forgiveness from the Goddess as well as from the God. In

the meantime, the Goddess had left her place in a huff. Brighu Maharishi pleaded with the God and wanted to atone for his sin. He prayed that God should bless him so that Sridevi should be born as his daughter and that in course of time when She became of age, Perumal himself should come down to earth and that Brighu Maharishi should have the privilege of conducting the wedding and becoming the father-in-law of Perumal himself. God conceded this wish.

In course of time, Brighu Maharishi was re-born on the earth as Nandakar. He is said to have gone to Kudalur and stayed there for a long time praying to Achyuta. On a Panguni Uthiram day in the Chakra theertham in a huge lotus flower which had the same emerald colour as the Perumal, a small female child was seen seated. The rishi who saw this strange sight picked up the girl. He then heard an asareeri voice telling him that the child was none other than Goddess Lakshmi and that it was the reward for his sincere prayers that the Goddess had come to live with him as his daughter. Nandaka rishi took the child to his asram. He brought her up with love and affection. In course of time, she came of age. One day, Perumal also came to the earth. He went and approached Nandaka rishi to give his daughter in marriage. The divine wedding was celebrated in the month of Panguni on uthiram day. As proof of this fact that Thayar was brought up as the daughter of Nandaka rishi, even today while offering worship to the Goddess here, the words "Nandaka muni punya rasi" and the word "Sri Nandakatmaja" are used. The wedding festival is celebrated even today for ten days with the final festival concluding on Panguni uthiram day.

In the month of vaikasi, a car festival is celebrated. It is said that for the first time, this car festival was performed by Nandaka rishi. This car festival is said to be the most important of all the festivals celebrated in this temple. The ratham itself is known as Ambarisha ratham.

However it is believed that the temple in its present location is a recent phenomenon. Once upon a time, the temple built by Nandaka rishi was to the north of the present Aduthurai Perumal temple. It was located almost in the middle of Kollidam river.

Once there was a big flood and the temple which was to the north of the present location got submerged under sand. It is believed that the moola vigraham along with the vigrahas of Sridevi and Bhoodevi was taken to the Perumal Koil in Vazhuttur. However, the present idol of Jagat Rakshakan is said to have been found by a fisherman who had kept it safe in his hut. One day, Rani Mangammal, the famous ruler had a dream. In that dream, God appeared and asked her to renovate the temple at Kudalur. Perumal told her that the idols were lying underneath the sand dunes and that the ratham was also covered by the sand dune. The next day, Rani Mangammal along with the ministers Raju Nayakar and Krishna Nayakar went from Tiruvaiyaru along the northern banks of the Kaveri. She was accompanied by her armies. When she reached the place where Aduthurai Perumal is now existing suddenly, a flash of lightning is said to have occurred. She met some fisher folk near that place and an old fisherman standing there said that God had appeared in his dream and told him that from the South elephants, horses and herd of armies would come accompanied by a queen and that she would help in re-installing the idol kept safe by him in his hut. Thus, the dream of Rani Mangammal coincided with that of the fisherman. Rani Mangammal went to the fisherman's hut and saw the beautiful idol of Perumal. She felt that the place where the lightning struck was an indication by Perumal for location of the temple. She therefore ordered her chiefs to build a temple there, i.e. the present Aduthurai Perumal koil. This, even today is on the main road about 12 kms. from Tiruvaiyaru. It is said that the Kings of Tanjore also helped liberally in renovating the ratha. Till 1924, the ratha was used. Subsequently, the ratha got so damaged that it could not be used. In the maha mandapam, on one of the stone pillars, there is a sculpted figure of a lady with folded hands. Next to that figure, in another pillar there is a figure of a man seated on horse with a chattai i.e. a whip in his hand. The local people claim that these two figures are that of Rani Mangammal and her chief Krishna Nayakar who helped Rani Mangammal in renovating and re-establishing this temple. Rani Mangammal gifted a lot of land houses and whole villages in order to ensure that pooja is offered to the deities in this temple regularly.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to the penance undertaken by Kaveri. Kaveri felt that the burden of carrying the sins of all the persons who had their bath in her waters and left their sins with her were becoming too heavy for her to bear. Long ago, when all the rivers met Badrinarayana, Kaveri asked Perumal to tell her a method by which she could remain pure even as she was purifying the sinners. God advised her to go to the divya kshetram known as Sangamam. He said that in that place, Indra and other Devas were coming in huge numbers and offering prayers to Perumal. He also said in that kshetram, Ambarisha, Indra, Chandra and others had worshipped Him and received His blessings. He said that if she offered her prayers in that place, He would appear in due course and grant her wish. Accordingly, Kaveri went to Sangama kshetram which is the present Aduthurai. She prayed to Janardhana. God appeared and granted her wish. He also said that henceforth she would be regarded as more holy than even Ganga and that whoever had a bath in the Kaveri at Sangama kshetra would definitely attain moksha. Kavery was very happy. It is almost as if she is clinging to the divine feet of Perumal as at this Sangama kshetra, Kaveri splits into two and flows around the temple.

Yet another story is related by word of mouth in this place. This is the story of a parrot. A long time ago, there was a parrot in Kudalur. Every day it would bring one fruit and offer it to Perumal and worship Him. One day, as it was returning with the fruit in its beak, a hunter let loose an arrow. The parrot fell down. It was not able to fly. Its only worry was that it was not able to fly and offer its daily fruit at the feet of Perumal. When the hunter came to collect the parrot, the parrot appealed to him and said that he should allow it for one last occasion to offer the fruit at the feet of the Lord. Hearing the parrot speak, the hunter got frightened and ran away. The parrot was not able to fly as it was severely wounded. As it was bemoaning its fate, Perumal appeared before the parrot, received the fruit and blessed it. The parrot was said to be none other than a hermit well versed in the sastras in his earlier birth. As soon as the Lord received the fruit and blessed the parrot, the parrot was

transformed into human form and that fortunate soul reached Vaikuntam.

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alwar has sung ten pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One pasuram with its meaning is given below:

Tirumangai Alwar - Peria Tirumozhi Pasuram- 5-2-2

செறுத்தினா திமிலேறுடைய பின்னை
செறுத்தனகோலம் பெற்று சூர்போல்
நறுந்தனா தீந்தேன உண்ட வயாடு
தறிஞ்சி பாடும் கூடலுடே.

Meaning:

The Lord who resides at Kudalur

Is the one

Who successfully fought and subjugated the seven sturdy oxen in order to marry Nappinnai, the yadava girl;

Even the bees at Kudalur while collecting sweet honey, hum a sweeter raga in Kurinji tune!

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

108 Tirupati Andadi

Poem

உண்டு கேட்டு உற்று மோந்துப் பார்க்கும் ஜவர்க்கே
தொண்டு படலாமோ உன் தொண்டனேன் - வின்னாடிநங்-
கும்
ஆடலூர நேமி முதல் ஐம்படையாய்! அன்புடையாய்
கூடலூராய்! இதனைக் கூறு.

Meaning:

Oh Lord

You who hold the ever successful and victorious chakrayudham (disc) and the remaining panchaayudhams in your hands;

Oh Lord of Kudalur who has infinite love towards all living creatures;

You bestowed on me the panchendriyams i.e. ear, mouth,

eyes, nose and body

Instead of using these priceless gifts in your service and obtaining supreme bliss when I am destroying myself by becoming a slave to the petty base pleasures that these senses provide why are you a silent spectator?

Isn't it your duty to protect me? You are my sole saviour.

* * *

THIRU NAGAI (NAGAPATTINAM)

This is one more of the divya desams located in Chola Nadu. Nagapattinam was at one point of time in history an important sea port. Strategically situated, connecting the great cities of the West and later the Arab cities on the one side with Burma and the Indonesian islands, the Philipines and China in the East. This is an ancient coastal city which grew in importance as a sea port and commercial centre in the days of the Cholas. A vihara was built at Nagapattinam for Buddhists and named after the king of Kedah. It also appears high level emissaries were stationed at Nagapattinam by the king of Kedah (Kadaram) one of the Indonesian islands.

Ptolemy, the ancient Greek geographer also mentions about this town and refers to it as a great emporium in the east coast of South India. This town has the distinction of being one among the 127 temples in the Tanjore District mentioned in the Thevaram hymns (hymn No.82).

The sthala purana of this place is related in Brahmanda puranam, Uttara Kandam in the gnana yoga part dealing with Soundararanya mahimai. It is related by Sutha Puranikar to his sishyas Sounaka and other rishis.

The temple is about one mile from Nagapattinam Railway station. The Perumal here is known as Neelamega Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. He is holding the mace in His hand. The utsavar is known as Soundarya Rajan. The Thayar is known as Soundarya valli. The utsava Thayar is seen as a Gajalakshmi. The theertham is Sara pushkarini. The vimanam is Soundarya vimanam. God appeared in response to the prayers of Nagaraja, Druva and Salisugan.

As this Perumal is in Soundaravanam, the Perumal is known as Soundararajan. He is also known as Azhagiyan i.e. a most beautiful person. The shrine of Sri Soundarya Raja Perumal is an ancient one with its origin dating back to the puranas. Sri Soundarya Raja is believed to have been worshipped by Adishesha in Krita yuga, by Bhoodevi in Treta yuga, by Markandeya in Dwapara yuga and by Salisuga Maharaja and

Nagaraja in Kali yuga. In this temple, one has dharshan of Sri Soundarya Raja in three poses - in the reclining posture as Sri Ranganatha, in the sitting posture as Sri Govindaraja and in the standing posture as Sri Soundarya Raja. The Perumal's vi-manam here has five kalasams which is a rarity. The vigraha of the Garuda in this temple also is peculiar in that the image is seen in a sitting posture.

There is not much of a sthala puranam connected with this temple. The story of Druva, the child, is too well known to bear any repetition. As he was ill-treated by his step-mother, the child undertook severe penance. It is said that Lord Vishnu was so taken in by the severe penance undertaken by this child that He came rushing on His Garuda vahanam to his succour, appeared before him and gave him a permanent place in the firmament. Even today, the Druva star stands as an example of a permanent landmark.

This is also said to be the place where Goddess Parvati who lost her beauty due to a curse of sage Brighu regained her beauty by doing penance. It is also said that the place is called Soundara Aranya kshetram as the Goddess regained Her beauty i.e. soundarya in this kshetram.

The Adisesha, the king of the Nagas did not have children. He prayed to the Perumal in this place and is said to have been blessed with a daughter. As the Naga Chief prayed to the Perumal here, this place came to be known Naga Pattinam i.e. the town of the Serpent king.

In Kali yuga, there was a Chola king by name Sali Sugan. He reportedly fell in love with a Naga princess and married her in the Soundarya vanam with the blessings of Perumal. This king, as a thanks giving measure, undertook reconstruction and renovation work in the temple. It is also said that one day when Salisuga Maharaja wanted to visit the Naga princess, he lost his way. It is said that God wanted to help His sincere devotee. However, he felt that He was not of much assistance in His sleeping and sitting postures. Hence He took on the standing

posture in the moolasthanam and showed the path to Salisuga Maharaja.

There is an idol of Ashta Bhuja Narasimha Swamy in the temple. This is a rarity as one sees Narasimha with eight hands performing two fold duties viz. that of Dushta nigraham and that of Sishta paripalanam i.e. one side He is destroying the demon Hiranyakasipu and on the other side, He is simultaneously blessing Prahladha, the child devotee.

There are 15 vimanams in this temple besides the Raja gopuram. The Raja gopuram is the tallest in the town. It was built in 1658 by Nagamallu Jagannatha Nayaka. There is a story connected with this temple tower. Nagapattinam was a port town as stated earlier. It had considerable trading activities during the Portuguese and Dutch times. The Dutch had trading activities in Bandar- Maschilipattinam in Andhra. In 1659 a person by name Jagul Nayakar, son of Nagamalu Mamudi Nayakar was appointed by the Dutch people as their Advisor with headquarters at Nagapattinam. He was a staunch vaishnavite. At that time, the temple did not have a Rajagopuram. The ships which used to berth at the Port needed a lighthouse very badly. Earlier, they were using the top of the Buddha Chaityam i.e. the prayer hall known as Pudu Velli Gopuram (New silver tower) as the light house. But as the Chaitya vihar became dilapidated, the Dutch gave a lot of money to Jagul Naicker, their Advisor and asked him to build a light house. This devotee is said to have built the seven tiered Rajagopuram to the temple and the topmost tier had a light built in to serve as the light house for the ships which had to come to the port. Even today, the local residents refer to this incident in their conversation when they use the phrase - "It is like the building of Rajagopuram". (கோயில் கோபுரம் கட்டியது போல்) This devotee built not only the gopuram but also the mandapam, the rampart walls etc. He also gifted a lot of lands, for meeting the expenditure in conducting pooja to the deity in the temple. The idol of himself and his wife standing with folded hands can be seen in that mandapam.

Epigraphical Highlights:

A Telugu silver plate grant now in the Batavia museum records that Vijayaraghava, the last Naik King of Tanjore gave Nagapat to the Dutch ¹

A Tamil silver plate grant in the same place records the confirmation of the above grant by Maharatha King Ekoji in 1676 A.D.²

Musicology:

Muthuswamy Dikshithar has composed a song in praise of Soundarya Raja Perumal here. The song Sri Soundararam asraye in Brindavana Saranga raga is given below with its meaning.

Ragam Brindavanasaranga - Rupaka Talam

Pallavi

Soundararajam Asraye gaja

Brundavana Saranga varaderajam

Anu Pallavi

Nandanandanarajam Nagabandhanarajam

Sundariramarajam Suravinutam Ahi rajam

Mandasmitthemukhambhujam

Mandavadara Karambhujam

Nandakavanayanambhujam

Sundarapadambhujam (Sou)

Charanam

Sambavairijanakam Sunnute sukha Sounakam

Ambarishadi viditam Anadi guruguhamuditam

Ambujanadinutam Amaresadi Sannutam

¹ 1 & 2. 893 G page 1347 Topographical list of the Inscriptions of Madras Presidency Vol.II by V.Rangacharya.

Ambudhi Garvanigraham Anrutajata dukha pakam
 Kambuvidambanakantam
 Khandikruta dasakantam
 Tumburunuta Sreekantam
 Duritapaha vaikuntam (Sou)

Meaning:

I surrender to Lord Soundararaja who protected the elephants and kept them as his Parivaram, who does not have any difference in treating the bird, animal and man and who is Karunanidhi - abode of compassion, who pleases Nandagopa, who brings name and fame to Nagapattinam, who is always with His consort Soundaravalli, who is praised by Devas, who appears as Seshataepa - who sleeps on the snake as his bed, who has always a smiling face, who has borne the Mandra Mountain on his hands, whose lotus like eyes give happiness, who has beautiful lotus like feet, who created Manmatha, enemy of Champarasura, who is praised by the sages Suka, Sounaka and Ambarisha, who pleases Lord Subramanya who is praised by Indra and Brahma, who is Parabrahma, who shattered the ego of Samudra Raja, who relieves the sorrow due to Asathya and Jatya, who has a lovely neck which resembles the conch, who killed Ravana, who has the lustre which is envied by even Gandharva, who relieves all sufferings and gives moksha.

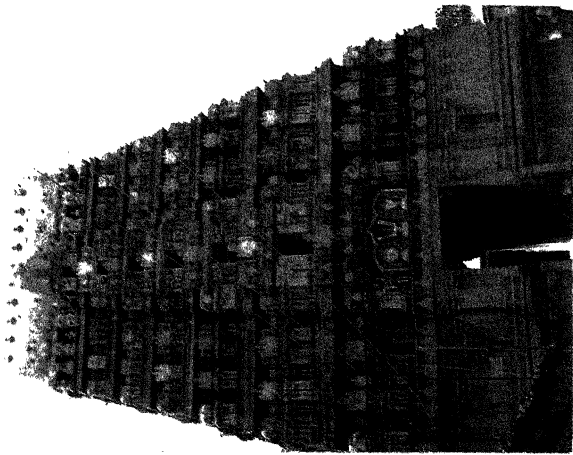
Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar has sung ten pasurams in praise of the Lord here. He has assumed the role of a Nayaki and addresses the God as Nayaka out of his boundless love and affection for his Lord.

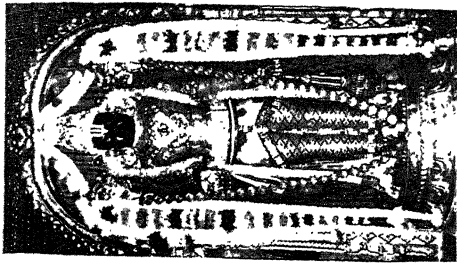
The pasuram from Peria Tirumozhi - 9-2-8 with its meaning is given below:

Pasuram:

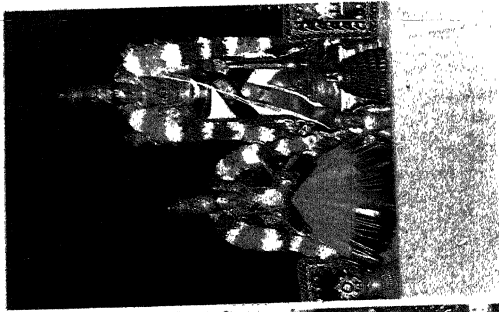
மஞ்சயர் மாமதி தீண்ட நீண்ட மாலிருஞ்சோலை
 மனோளர் வந்து என்
 நெஞ்சுள்ளும் கண்ணுள்ளும் நின்று நீங்கள் நீர்மலை
 யார் கொல்? நினைக்க மாட்டேன்



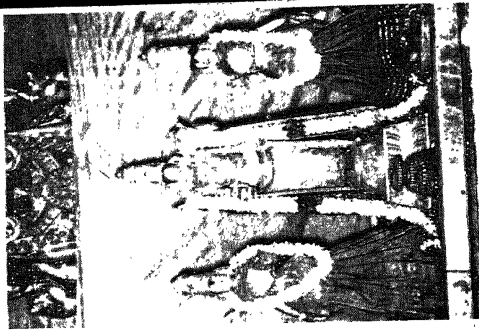
Thiru Nagai - Gopuram View



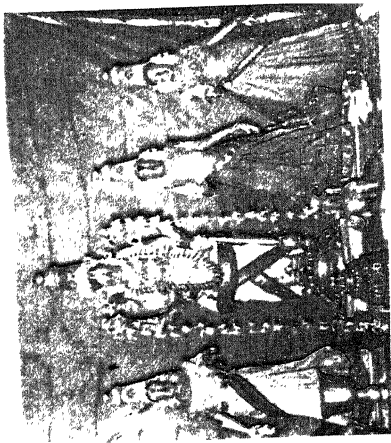
Thiru Nagai - Sri Soundararajaperumal - Moolavar



Thirucheral - Saranatha Perumal Utsavamurthis



Thiru Nagai - Utsavamurthis



மஞ்சயர் பொன்மலை மேலெழுந்த மாமுகில்
 போன்றுளர் வந்து காணீர்
 அஞ்சிறைப் புள்ளுமொன்று ஏறி வந்தார் அச்சோ
 ஒருவறமுகியவா!

Meaning:

The renowned beauty of Thiru Malirunsolai Where there are tall peaks whose tips almost touch the path of the Moon God - He, my master, has taken His permanent abode in my mind and eyes.

Is He the Neervanna Perumal of Thiru Neermalai
 I shall ever think of Him.

He looks like a dark cloud on the top of a golden mountain;
 He has come riding on the beautiful Garuda bird;
 Oh friends of mine! Hurry up!

Come to see Him!

(Here the Alwar takes on the role of Parakala Nayaki).— —

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108 Thirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

சேர்ந்துனக்குக் குற்றேவல் செய்திலன், என் சிந்தையில்
 நீ ஆர்ந்த தற்கோர் கைம்மாறு அறிகிலேன் - பூந்துவரை
 மன்னா! கையாழிவலவா! வலம்புரியாய்!
 தென் நாகையாய்! அருளிச் செய்.

Meaning:

Lord of Dwaraka!

Lord who holds the chakra in the hand;

Lord who has the Panchajanyam in the hand;

Oh adorable one who is residing at beautiful Nagai!

So far I have done nothing worth while to you,

Yet out of your benign kindness you are lovingly
 residing in my heart;

As I am not able to think how to thank you for this act of kindness, you may please, yourself enlighten me as to what I should do.

THIRUCHCHERAI

This place is one of the divya desams of Chola Nadu. It is about three miles from Nachiyar koil in Tanjore District and about seven miles to the south east of Kumbakonam. The moolavar here is known as Saranathan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east along with Goddess Kaveri, Markandeya rishi, Sri Devi, Bhoodevi and Neela devi. The Thayar is known as Sara Nayaki. The theertham is known as Sara pushkarini. The vimanam is Sara vimanam. God appeared here before Kaveri and Markandeya rishi.

This is a small village but with great puranic and historical references.

The sthala purana of this place is related in Brahmanda puranam in a conversation between Lord Siva and Narada (1 to 6 adyayas). Bhavishya purana also mentions this story in its Madhya kanda, again in the course of a conversation between Lord Siva and Narada (68 to 72 adyayas). At the time of yuga pralayam, Brahma, the Creator was called by Maha Vishnu and asked to make a good pot and keep in it for safe custody the vedas, the agamasastras and the puranic texts. Brahma accordingly visited each of the divya desams took the mud and made a pot. But to his chagrin, everywhere the pot would break. He was a very worried man. He rushed to Maha Vishnu and asked Him to give him a solution. Lord Vishnu told him that there are twelve swayam vyaktha kshetrams on earth and he should go to one amongst those swayam vyaktha kshetrams viz. Sara kshetram and take the mud out of the pushkarini in that kshetra and make the pot. Lord Brahma acted accordingly. The pot did not break. It is believed that Sara kshetram is being guarded by Brighu, Sounaka, Vyasa, Markandeya, Parasara, Vainatheya and other rishis who were doing penance on its banks. Thus, with the grace of God, Brahma was able to safeguard veda agama saram and hence the word 'sara' was attributed as a prefix to this theertham and also the vimanam and the murthi here. This place is therefore known as Sara kshetram, the tank as Sara pushkarini, the vimanam i.e. the tower over the garbhagriha as Sara vimanam, the God and the Goddess as Saranathan

and Saranayaki. The place is therefore known as Pancha Sara kshetram.

Another story connected with this sacred vaishnavite shrine relates to the Kaveri river's claim for ascendancy over the river Ganga. It is said that on one occasion, the Saptha kannikas i.e. Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Sindhu, Kaveri, Godavari and Saraswati were playing on the slopes of the Vindhya mountain. At that time, a Gandharva by name Visvavasu happened to pass that way. He bowed to them in a reverential manner and did namaskaram. Immedaately, a dispute arose among these seven girls as to who was the receipient of the respectful namaskaram from the Gandharva. They therefore decided to clear the matter with the same Gandharva when he returns in the evening in the same path. Accordingly, that evening when the Gandharva returned, the girls asked for an answer to their crucial question: The Gandharva realised that if he were to mention anyone by name, the other six would get angry and may curse him. He therfore very cleverly told them that his reverential namaskaram was meant for whoever was the greatest amongst them. Immediately, as anticipated, a dispute arose as to who amongst them was the greatest. Finally, only two people viz. Kaveri and Ganga were laying claim for this superiority. They decided to approach Brahma and ask for a judgment.

Brahma narrated to them the story relating to the origin of Ganga. Once upon a time, there was a demon king by name Mahabali. He defeated the devas and got control over Indraloka. He was causing a lot of trouble to the devas. Atithi, mother of the devas approached Mahavishnu and asked Him to find a solution to this vexed problem. Vishnu told her that He would be born in the world and punish Mahabali. In course of time, Mahavishnu was born as Vamana. Meanwhile, Mahabali intending to establish control over all the worlds was performing a visvajit yagam. While performing the yaga, he gifted cows and other riches to brahmins. At that time, Mahavishnu in His dimunitive form as a small brahmin boy approached Mahabali and requested for three feet of land. Bali felt that the three feet of land covered by this Vamanan was very much within his ability to give and agreed. But after having agreed, the Perumal

converted Himself from the Vamana form to viswaroopam and covered the entire earth with one step; with the other step he covered all the seven worlds; the third step he hept on the head of Mahabali and pushed him down to Pathalam. When the second foot reached Satya loka, Brahma washed that divine foot. The water which was used for washing the feet of Maha Vishnu in Satyaloka swelled and fell on to the earth as Ganga. Brahma therefore said that Ganga was the most holy of the rivers. Hearing this, Kaveri felt very dejected and she decided to do severe penance in order to be declared as the most holy river.

Kaveri did severe penance to lord Brahma. In course of time, Brahma appeared before Her and said that He was pleased with her prayers and that she would be given a status equal to that of Ganga. But Kaveri was not satisfied with this. She wanted nothing less than precedence and superiority over Ganga. Brahma then advised her to go to Sara kshetram, sit under the Arasa maram (peepul tree) on the banks of Sara pushkarini and pray sincerely to Perumal. He assured her that her prayers would definitely be answered.

Accordingly, Kaveri went to Sara pushkarini and took her place under the peepul tree and did deep penance. In the month of Thai, on a full moon day, Maha Vishnu manifested Himself in the form of a crawling child and appeared before Kaveri. Kaveri recognised in the child Lord Narayana. She held the child close to her and prayed to the Lord to give her the privilege of seeing His true swaroopa. Immediately, Lord Vishnu appeared before her sitting on Garuda along with Sridevi, Neeladevi and adorned with His shanku and chakra ayudams. He also showed her His dasa avatarams. Kaveri prayed to God to grant her three boons. Firstly she wanted Perumal to continue to stay in Sara kshetram for ever so that other devotees also could have His darshan. She requested him to give moksha to all the people including herself. As a third boon, she requested that she should be recognised as superior to Ganga. God granted all these three wishes of hers. Perhaps it is this which made the Alwar sing in his pasuram that in this place Kaveri is more holy than even Ganga. There is a small sannidhi for Kaveri under the peepul tree near the tank.

While dealing with the sthalapurana of Srirangam, the story as to how the Pranavakara Sriranga vimanam which was gifted by God to Vibhishana got fixed at Srirangam on the banks of Kaveri was related. Even then God had told Vibhishana that he had promised Kaveri in response to her prayers that he would come and reside on her banks and ensure that she is regarded as more holy than Ganges. It was the boon granted to Kaveri at Tiruchcherai that was fulfilled at Srirangam.

There is yet another interesting story connected with this place. This has no puranic authority. But is very popular widely related Karnaparampara katha i.e. a story related through successive generations by word of mouth. But it has a certain connection with the existing state of affairs in the temple. It is therefore worthwhile to relate this story also. It is said that once upon a time, Alagiya Manavala Nayaka was ruling at Tanjore. He was engaged in the construction of Rajagopalaswamy temple at Mannargudi in Tanjore District. Due to non-availability of the special type of stones required for constructing the temple in Tanjore District, the king made alternative arrangements to have the stones carted from outside the district. But unknown to the king, his minister by name Narasa Bhoopalan had a special interest in renovating the Saranatha temple at Tiruchcherai. He therefore ordered that one stone from each cart of stones meant for the Mannargudi temple be off-loaded at Tiruchcherai. By this small diversion, Narasa Bhoopalan was able to renovate the Tiruchcherai temple completely. But as happens usually, this unauthorised diversion was duly reported to the king. The king decided to investigate the truth of this allegation. He decided to visit Tiruchcherai himself. Narasa Bhoopalan came to know about this proposed visit. Immediately, he collected his wits and decided to win over the king. He knew that the king had great bakthi towards Rajagopala swami. Hence in the mandapam, in front of the Tiruchcherai koil, he installed the idols of Rajagopala swami with His consorts. The king when he visited this temple saw to his great surprise that his ishta deivam i.e. favourite deity was also installed in the temple precincts and that the renovation work has also provided facilities for his favourite deity. The king therefore approved of this diversion and sanctioned the entire expenses for the complete renovation of the temple. Thus, it is that even today we find a small sannidhi for Rajagopala

swamy Perumal along with His nachiyars in the Thiruchcherai temple.^{14.24}

A special feature of this divya desam is that it is the only vaishnavite temple where the Perumal gives darshan along with His five consorts. It is believed that He is seen with His five consorts as Kaveri who had dharshan of the Perumal as He is seen in Vaikuntam. It is also said that the five Goddesses represent the pancha bhoothams. Sri Devi represents earth; Bhoomidevi represents Vayu; Neela Devi Akasa; Sara Nayaki represents water and Mahalakshmi seated on the chest represents fire. Another unique feature is that this is one of the few vaishnavite temples where Thai Poosam is celebrated. It is said that Thai Poosam is celebrated more for the glory and pleasure of Kaveri Thayar who had the dharshan of Perumal in response to her sincere prayers. In addition, the moolavar is seen having padmam a lotus in His right hand even as Lord Vishnu has padmam in His right hand while He is sitting with His consorts at Sri Vaikuntam.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

On the slab standing at the entrance into the central shrine of the Saranatha Perumal temple at Thiruchcherai, there is an inscription relating to the king Parakesarivarman Chola dynasty. It seems to register a gift of sheep made for meeting the expenses to light a lamp in the temple.¹

In another inscription on a stone set up in a field to the north of the same temple, the same king Parakesarivarman registers a grant of land called Mavadipallam for meeting the expenses towards the mid-day offerings of the God Saranathasvamin, by one Baba-Sahib on the occasion of the birth of his son. At the top are carved the figures of the Vadagalai Vaishnava mark (without middle line) and sankha and chakra.²

On a stone built into the tank in front of the Saranatha Perumal temple, there is a mutilated record relating to the 10th year of the Chola King Parakesarivarman. It records gift of sheep for lighting a lamp to the temple at Serrur a devadana in Serrurkurram by a native of Kiramangalam.³

¹ Ins. 139 ARIE 1931-32 App.B

² ARIE 1931-32 App.B B 140

³ Ins. 612 of 1909 - Epigraphical list of the Ins.of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya.

On another stone in the same place, there is a fragmentary record of the chola king Rajendra Chola-I. It contains a portion of the historical introduction which begins with Thirumamani.⁴

On the southern wall of the central shrine in the same temple is a record (Saka 1566 Tarana) of the gift of land to the temple of Saranatha swamy and to the shrine of Alwar by a certain Govinda Dasa for the merit of the king Vijayaraghava. There is a doubt whether this donor is the celebrated Govinda Dikshathar, minister of Achutappa Nayaka (1572-1614).⁵

There is another inscription in the central shrine in the Sara Parameswara temple, a hamlet of Tiruchcherai. This records gift of money for a lamp to the temple at Tiruchcherai.⁶

Yet another inscription on the northern wall of the same mandapa relates to the 5th year of the Chola king Vikrama Chola Deva (1118-35) which records a gift of land to the shrine of the Goddess.⁷

Another very interesting record is to be found on the northern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in the Sara Parameswara temple. This relates to the 9th year of the rule of Tribhuvana Chakravartin Vikramal Chola Deva. It records sale of land. But the inscription is of fiscal interest as it says that in accordance with the king's Srimukha, the lands of those who were in two years arrears of the royal dues during the 47th year of the reign should be sold and that the lands of certain brahmana tenants who had been unable to pay the taxes and left the village were also sold to the local temple.⁸

⁴ Ins. 613 of 1909 - Epigraphical list of the Ins. of the Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya.

⁵ Ins. 614 of 1909 - Epigraphical list of the Ins. of the Madras Presidency by V. Rangacharya.

⁶ 616 of ARIE 1909

⁷ 617 of ARIE 1909

⁸ 620 of ARIE 1909

HYMNOLOGY:

Tirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has composed 13 pasurams praising the Lord here. One of these pasurams with its meaning is given below.

Peria Thirumozhi - 7-4-4.

Pasuram:

தேராளும் வாளரக்கன் தென்னிலங்கை வெஞ்சமத்துப்
பொன்றி வீழ்
போராளும் சிலையதனால பொருகணைகள் போக்குவித்தா
யென்று நாளும்
தாராளும் வரைமார்பன் தண்சேறை செம்பெருமான்
உம்பராளும்
பேராளன் பேரோதும் பெரியோரை ஒருகாலும்
பிரிகிலேனே.

Meaning:

I will never be away - even for a moment - from those devotees who are for ever chanting the myriad divine names of this Lord of Thenchennai.

He wears the thulasi garland round His neck;

He is the one who defeated and destroyed the mighty rakshasa Ravana who was the ruler of Lanka and who had a mighty army under his command.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108 Tirupathi Andadi Poem:

சென்று சென்று செல்வநம் செருக்குவர் வாயில்தோறும்
நின்று நின்று தூங்கும் மடநெஞ்சமே! - இன் தமிழைக்
கூறைக்கும் சோற்றுக்கும் கூறுதே பேறுகச்
சேறைக்கு நாயகன் பேர் செப்பு.

Meaning:

Oh you foolish mind

You are exhausted and tired after having stood for a long time begging for alms in

front of the houses of those who are
arrogant because of their wealth.

Instead of using your gift to compose and sing
poems in sweet Tamil for the sake of
food and cloth

Sing the myriad names of the Perumal at Thiruchcherai and
you will attain moksha.

Here this poet reflects the very same thought expressed by
Thyagaraja when he scoffed at the gifts sent by Tanjore Raja
and burst into song to his favourite deity Rama and said:

"Nidhi chala sukhama, Ramuni sannidhi sukam? i.e. He
wanted to know which gave greater lasting happiness, wealth
(nidhi) or nearness to Rama (Ramuni sannidhi).

* * *

THIRUVELLIANGUDI

This is a place which is of special significance to one among the Navagraha deities viz. Sukra Baghavan. There are temples for each of these Navagrahas in Tanjore District itself. Suryanar Koil is the place where there is a temple for Lord Surya i.e. the Sun God. At Indalur there is the temple for the Moon God i.e. Chandran. Vaidheeswaran koil is for Sevvai i.e. Mars. Thiruvankadu for Budha, Alangudi for Guru, Thiru Velliangudi for Sukra, Thiru Nallar for Sani (Saturn), Sri Vanchiyam for Rahu and Kethu. Thus, all the nine grahas have nine holy places where the people can offer special prayers and try to get over any malefic influence cast by the aspecting of these grahas with reference to their horoscopes.

As stated earlier, this place is where prominence is given to Sukra. As Sukra stands for silver, this place is known as Velliyan kudi i.e. the place where Velli i.e. silver i.e. Sukra resides. This is 3 miles east of Mayavaram railway station. It is located to the east of Cholapuram. This place is believed to have been in existence in all the four yugas. It is known varyingly as Brahmapuram, Parasara kshetram, Indrapuram, Bhargavpuram. While singing the pasurams in praise of this place, Thirumangai Alwar referred to this place along with Thirumaliruncholai as Koil. In vaishnavite sampradayam, the word 'koil' is used while referring to the most important of the temples. Thus, it is only the Srirangam temple that is usually referred to as koil. As Thirumangai Alwar has referred to this temple as koil, this place is believed to have great divine significance. Senganathur the birth place of Peri Vacham Pillai is about 3/4 mile from this shrine. God is believed to have appeared to Sukran, Brahma, Indra, Parasara, Bhargava, Markandeya, Rishis and also to Mayanan, the demon.

The moolavar here is known as Kolavil Raman. He is seen in a Bhujanga sayanam posture facing east. The utsavar is known as Srungara Sundaran. The Goddess is known as Maragathavalli. There are four theerthams here known as Sukra theertham, Brahma theertham, Indra theertham and Parasara theertham. The sthala viruksham is Kadali viruksham

(sevvazhai i.e. vazhai plantain). In the inner prakara in the ground even today this plantain tree can be seen. The Alwar has also sung about this sthala viruksham in his pasuram. The vimanam is Pushkalavarthaka vimanam. This temple was renovated ten years ago, thanks to the efforts taken by Srimad Andavan of Peria Ashramam at Tiruchy.

One of the sthala puranas in this place explains as to why the place is known as Brahmapuri. Once Lord Brahma became very egotistic and arrogant. Consequently, he lost his post. Faced with this loss, he became repentant. He realised his folly and he went from place to place praying for forgiveness to get back the lost post. In course of time, he reached Velliangudi. The atmosphere was so peaceful and inviting that he continued to stay there. He is believed to have constructed a tank there. He had his bath in the waters of that tank and then offered prayers to Srungara Sundara Perumal. In course of time, God appeared before him and gave him back his post. Hence it is that this place is known as Brahmapuri and the pushkarini used by Brahma for his daily bath came to be known as Brahma theertham. Even today in the month of Vaikasi when the Rohini star is in the ascendant and also in the month of Masi those who have their bath in this tank are able to wash away their sins.

Parasara rishi stayed in this place for a long time and offered sincere prayers to Srungara Sundara Perumal by repeating the Dwadasa and Ashtakshara mantram and following the procedure prescribed in the Vaikanasa method. In course of time, God appeared before him and blessed him.

Lord Indra who lost his post due to his arrogant behaviour towards Durvasa rishi is also believed to have come to this place and offered sincere prayers to the Perumal. He renovated the vimanam and celebrated various holy festivals and utsavams. In course of time he was able to regain his lost kingdom. Hence it is that this place is also known as Indrapuri as Indra stayed here for a long time. Brighu Maharishi also stayed in this place for a long time, did deep penance and only then had dharshan of the Lord. Hence it is that this place is known as Bhargavapuri.

Yet another story connected with this place is related to Asura Guru Sukrachariar. The story as to why God assumed the form of a Vamanan in order to humble and punish Mahabali is well known. Mahabali was a very powerful asura king. He was giving much trouble to the devas. The devas approached Vishnu for help. Mahabali was also a king who was giving a lot of gifts and performing a number of yagas. Maha Vishnu felt that He will have to punish him only by exploiting this weakness viz. his generosity. Vishnu therefore took on the form of Vamana, a young Brahmachari with a diminutive form. He approached Mahabali and asked that He be gifted with that extent of land which He will cover with His three feet. Mahabali felt that the small foot of Vamana could not occupy much land. He readily agreed. But Sukrachari realised that Vamana was none other than Vishnu. He tried to dissuade Bali from giving his word. But he failed. As a last resort, when Mahabali was trying to pour water through his kamandalam to wash the hands of Vamana, Sukra took on the form of a beetle and blocked the spout of the kamandalam. Vamana realised what had happened. He took a dharba (kusa grass) and poked the spout ostensibly to clear the path. But the dharba injured the eye of Sukrachari who was in the form of a beetle. The asura guru therefore lost his sight. Sukrachari also felt repentant at what he had done. He therefore started roaming about the various forests seeking God. In course of time, he came to Thiru Velliangudi. He continued to suck the honey from the flowers in the area and add to the waters in the Brahma theertha pushkarini. Thus, the water in the pushkarini became very sweet. As this water was used for performing Thirumanjanam i.e. holy bath to the Lord, Sukrachari in the form of the beetle continued to render this sweet service to the Lord. In course of time, Perumal rewarded him by appearing before him and absolving him of all his sins. Sukrachari also regained his eye sight. As Sukra stayed here and did penance for long and was able to attain the darshan of the Lord, the place came to be known as Sukrapuri. Thirumangai Alwar in his pasuram refers to this incident when he sings "Velliyar vananga viraindu arul seivan" Literally translated this means that even as Velliyar i.e. Sukrachariar was offering prayers to the Lord, the Lord was rushing to his rescue.

The moolavar here is known as Kola Vil Raman. Thirumangai Alwar also addressed the God here as Kola Vil Raman in his Peria Thirumozhi 4th decad 10th pasuram.

Yet another story explains as to how the moolavar here got this name as Kola Vil Raman. This is connected with an incident that had happened in the life of Perumal during His Ramavataram. As is well known, Rama, the son of Dasaratha, was banished to the forest for fourteen years so that Kaikeyee's request to King Dasaratha could be fulfilled. Rama along with Lakshmana and Sita went to the forest. In course of time, they stayed for some time in Chitra kutam. One day while Rama was sleeping with His head on the lap of Sita, Jayanthan, the son of Indra lost his deva guna and was overcome with asura guna. Seeing the beautiful form of Goddess Sita Devi, he took on the form of a crow and misbehaved with Sita Devi. The Goddess could have very well dealt with him and punished him. But she did not want to disturb the sleep of Rama whose head was resting on Her lap. But once when the crow pecked her, a drop of blood fell on Rama's face. He woke up and understood the whole situation. Rama's bow and arrow was closeby. But Rama just formed the shape of a bow with His two delicate fingers and used the holy grass (dharba) as the Brahma Astra and let it loose on the crow. The asura crow tried to escape from the Brahmastra. He ran to all the nooks and corners of the seven worlds. But found that the Brahma Astram was without fail catching up with him. The asura crow realised his mistake. He knew that he could not escape from this arrow of death unless he sought saranagathi at the feet of the Goddess herself. He therefore went back to Chitrakut and fell exhausted at the feet of the Goddess and sought her protection. The Goddess, out of her magnanimity, even then turned the face of the crow towards the feet of Lord Rama making it appear thereby that the crow had sought saranagathi at the feet of Perumal. Rama then withdrew the Brahmastra after destroying one eye of the crow. As God used his long delicate fingers as a bow and a dharba as an arrow, He came to be known as Kola Vil Raman.

In the meantime, other incidents were unfolding themselves in the life history of Velliangudi. There was an asura ar-

chitect by name Mayanan. He wanted to outshine Visvakarma, the divine architect who built parama padam. Mayanan approached Brahma and wanted to be enlightened on the means for attaining excellence. Brahma then told him that Visvakarma had a lot of punya and consequentially had the full blessings of Lord Narayana. Hence it was that Tirupparkadal where Vaikuntanatha was staying was built by Visvakarma. He advised Mayanan to do severe penance and to seek the blessing of Perumal Himself if he wanted to equal Visvakarma, the divine architect. Accordingly, Mayanan went to the banks of the Kaveri. Finally, he reached Bhaskara kshetram. Markandeya rishi was immersed in deep penance at that place. He found that the place was full of beautiful groves and filled with flowers. He started his penance there. In course of time, God appeared before him and asked him to choose his boon. The asura then said that the place was so beautiful and that when Perumal appeared before him, he felt that the place was almost like Chitra kutam. He prayed to God to give him dharshan in the same form in which he was seen in the beautiful Chitra kutam. God conceded his wish. Perumal therefore appeared before Mayanan as Kolavil Raman. Mayanan built a huge temple for the Perumal here. He also constructed the Pushkalavarthaga vimanam i.e. gopuram on the top of the sanctum sanctorum and prayed to Perumal to continue to stay there and give dharshan to the numerous devotees. Hence it is that the moolavar in this divya desam is known as Kola Vil Raman. In addition, the utsavar is known as Srungara Sundarar as it represents the beautiful young king Rama who was banished into the forest.

The Garudalwar in this place holds in his hand shanku and chakra. It is said that when Perumal was rushing in response to the sincere prayers of Mayanan with his entire entourage of the divine consort as well as Garuda and other devas, Mayanan prayed to God to give him dharshan as Kola Vil Raman. Perumal is therefore believed to have handed over His conch and the disc to Garuda to hold for a while till he enabled Mayanan to see Him as Kola Vil Raman. Thus, it is that Garudalwar even today is seen holding the Sankhu and the Chakra, the weapons of Perumal as the moolavar here is giving dharshan to all only as Kola Vil Raman.

It is believed that as this temple is the residence of God it is almost equal to Paramapadam. Visiting this one divya desam is said to be equal to visiting all the other divya desams on this earth.

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

There is only one stone inscription found in the temple precincts.

On the northern wall of the central shrine in Kola Vil Raman temple at Thiruvallianguudi, there is an inscription which refers to the Vijayanagara dynasty, King Krishnadeva - Maharaya Saka 1439, in Tamil, which mentions the eastern conquests of the king and the Siva and Vishnu temples in the Chola mandalam to which he made a gift of certain taxes.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here and he has rendered ten pasurams praising the Lord. One such pasuram with its meaning is given below:

Peria Thirumozhi - 4-10-9

Pasuram:

குடிசுடி யாகக் கூடிநின்று அமரர் குணங்களே
 பிதற்றி நின் நேத்த
 அடியவர்க்கு அருளி அரவணைத் துயின்ற ஆழியான்
 அணர்ந்துறை கோயின்
 கடியுடைக் கமலம் அடியிடை மலரக் கரும்பொடு
 பெருஞ்செந்நெல் ஊசைய
 வடிவுடை அன்னம் பெடையோடும் சேரும்
 வயல்வெள்ளியங் குடியதுவே.

Meaning:

Even as Brahma, Siva, Indra and other devas assembled in this place are singing the praise of His qualities of Parath-

¹ Inscription No.100 ARIE 1932 - Appendix B)

wam (exalted nature) Sowlabhyam (easy approachability) Sowseelyam (friendly nature) and vatsalyam (quality of love and affection), The Perumal is seen lying down on Adisesha and blessing the devotees who seek Him.

Here in the fields amidst sugar cane and ripe paddy crop, there are lotus flowers in full bloom. When the breeze wafts in the air, the luscious sugarcane and paddy sheaves bend with the breeze and dance gently as if they are fanning the Lord. There are two swans - a male and a female swan seated on the lotus flower. That idyllic place is Thiruvalliankudi. Here the Alwar refers to God and Thayar as the male and female swan).

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108 Tirupathi

Andadi Poem:

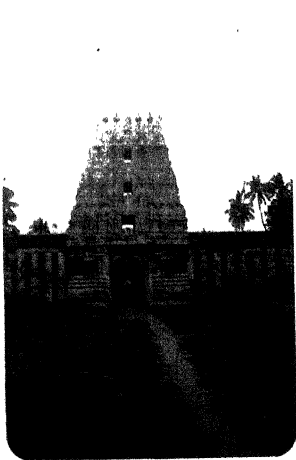
காலளவும போதாக கடல் ஞாலத்தோர் சுற்ற
நூலளவே நுவலவார ஆர? - கோலப்
பருவெளளி அங்குடியான் பாதக ஊன் மாய்த்த
திரு வெளனியங்குடியான் சீர்.

Meaning:

The people who live in this world are able to tell us only to the extent to which they have read in the books about the greatness of that Perumal at Thiruvalliankudi.

The Perumal who rid the sin of Lord Siva, the resident of beautiful kailash mountain and Who had to beg for alms to satisfy His pangs of hunger. Who is there Who can understand Him fully and comprehensively and satisfactorily explain to others about His glory? i.e. to say He is beyond all comprehension - an enigma - a mystery.

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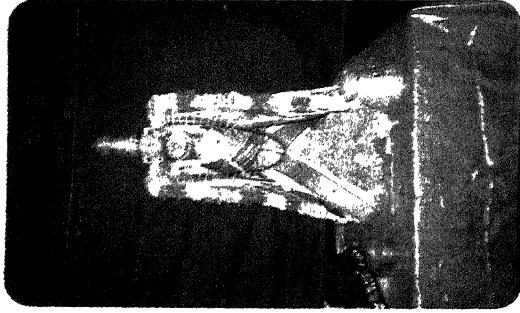
Thiru Velliangudi - Gopuram View



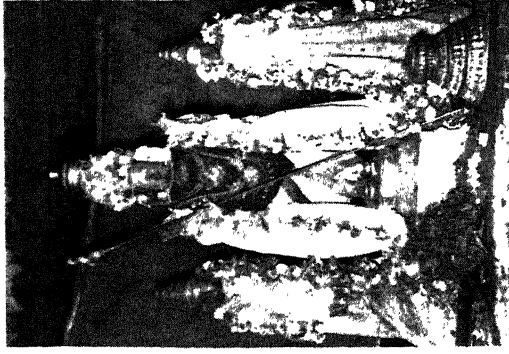
Thiru Velliangudi - Gopuram

Thiru Velliangudi - Temple View





Thiru Velliangudi - Sri Kolavil Raman



Thiru Velliangudi - Sri Kolavil Raman Utsavamurthis

THIRU THANJAI MAMANI KOVIL

The moment Tanjore is mentioned, it is only the Brahadéeswarar koil and the engineering marvel of a big circular stone on the top of the gopuram which strikes our mind. The Brahadéeswarar koil is a Saivite temple. Very few will believe that in the same town, there is a less known temple, but it is one of the 108 Vaishnavite divya desams. Actually this temple lies about 2.5 miles from Tanjore railway junction. There are three temples which constitute this divya desam.

The first temple is known as Tanjai Mamani Kovil. The moolavar is known as Neelamega Perumal. The Thayar is known as Sengamalavalli Thayar. The theerthams are known as Amrutha theertham, Kanaka pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Soundarya vimanam. God is seen in a sitting posture facing east. He appeared in response to the prayers of Parasara Muni.

The second temple is known as Tanjai Yali kovil. The moolavar here is Narasimha swamy. The Goddess is known as Tanjai Nayaki. The vimanam is Veda Sundara Vimanam. The pushkarini is known as Surya pushkarini and Sri Rama theertham. God is seen in a sitting posture facing east.

The third temple is Manikunra temple. The moolavar is known as Mani kunra perumal. Thayar is known as Ambujavalli. The vimanam is Manikooda vimanam. Theertham is known as Sri Rama theertham. God is seen in a sitting posture facing east. God is said to have appeared in response to the prayers of Markandeya.

The utsavars in each of the three temples are known as Sriman Narayana.

Another noteworthy feature is that it was in this divya desam that Swami Desikan's son Sri Nainar Acharya ordained that during Anādhyaanam period (when the Divya prabandhams should not be recited) Desika prabandhas should be recited in all the divya desas.

The sthala puranam relating to these three temples centres around one incident as to how Perumal punished the three demons by name Tanjakan, Dantakan and Tarakan. Long ago, in Parasara kshetram, Parasara muni had built an asram for himself and was offering sincere prayers. At about that time, the milky ocean had been churned and amrutham obtained and distributed amongst the devas and rishis by Lord Vishnu who took on the form of Mohini. Parasara was one of the rishis who obtained a little bit of amrutham for himself. Instead of eating the amrutham then and there, Parasara rishi decided to bring it to his asram and share it with his disciples as also the trees, animals and otehr living beings living in that Parasara kshetram. Seeing him carry the divine nectar, Indra warned him and expressed the fear that the asuras may again waylay him and grab the coveted amrutham. Parasra rishi felt that he would be able to take it safely to his asram and therefore did not pay any heed to the advice given by Indra. Parasara rishi succeeded in taking it to the asram. He mixed it in the waters of the tank near his asram so that all the disciples, all the living beings in that area could flourish and live happily. As he had added the amrutham into that tank the tank came to be known as Amruthavarthini. The trees, the creepers, the animals, the disciples of the rishi, and the area itself prospered. But in the meantime, a drought occurred on earth. It lasted for twelve long years. It was followed by severe famine. The only place which was not affected was the Parasara asram. The three demons Tanjakan, Dantakan and Tarakan heard about this. They with their followers and other demons therefore came to Parasara rishi's asram. They partook of the water from the Amruthavarthini tank. They regained their lost strength as also their evil thoughts and habits. They started giving trouble to the rishis and their disciplies. Parasara rishi went and met Lord Brahma and asked him for help to get rid of the demons. Brahma expressed his inability to intervene in the matter as He was a Creator and could not therefore take up any act of destruction. He asked the rishi to approach Lord Siva. The rishi accordingly undertook a deep penance and prayed to Lord Siva. Siva appeared before him and advised him to approach Maha Vishnu who alone could destroy the demons. However, Siva said that He would send Chandika Devi to help them to hold the

demons at bay atleast for some time till Maha Vishnu resolved the problem. Chandika Devi accompanied Parasara rishi and started guarding the asram. Seeing Chandika Devi, Dantakan took his bow and arrow and virtually showered arrows on the asram. Chandika Devi got angry. She destroyed the rathas of asuras. She released the sulayutham and destroyed the sakthi weapon let loose by Tanjakan. Tanjakan fell unconscious on the ground. But, unfortunately, even as she was slaying the demons, the others would go and sprinkle the water from the amrutha varthini and the demons would spring back to life, thus it seemed a continuous severe endless fight. In the meantime, Maha Vishnu appeared before Parasara rishi. Maha Vishnu reminded the rishi about the advice given by Indra on the advisability of taking amrutham to the earth. However, like the proverbial swan separating the milk from the water, Perumal separated amrutham from the tank. Thus, the defeated demons could not renew their energy by drinking the water mixed with amrutham in the tank as the Lord seperated the amrith from the waters in the tank.

Having taken the first step of ensuring that the amrutham is denied to the demons, Maha Vishnu decided to fight with Tanjakan and Dantakan leaving Tarakan to Chandika Devi. Tanjakan let loose a lot of arrows. But all the arrows which fell on Vishnu were like flowers being showered on the Lord causing no damage to the Lord. Suddenly Tanjakan took on the form of an elephant, took a sala tree in his trunk and rushed on to the God. Immediately God transformed Himself into Narasimha and was all set to tear the elephant to pieces. The asura seeing the fierce form of Narasimhar, transformed himself back into a demon. Perumal in the form of Narasimhar, however, caught hold of him by his hair, put him on his lap and wanted to break his head and tear open his heart. At that time, the asura pleaded with Perumal to grant him a small wish before his death. God asked him to ask for the boon. The demon Tanjakan then said, 'O Lord! You have taken on the form of Narasimha just to destroy me. I pray that you continue to stay here and enable the devotees to see You in the same Narasimha roopa in this place'. In addition, he prayed that the place where he was going to be killed should be named as Tanjapuri in

remembrance of himself. God granted both his prayers. Thus, it is that the place got the name Tanjapuri which, in course of time, has got corrupted as Tanjavur.

Seeing that Tanjakan was killed, the other demon Dantakan got frightened. He started running into the crevices of the earth. Perumal took on the form of a Varaha (a boar). He chased him under the ground and killed him.

Tarakan was fighting with Chandika Devi. Kali succeeded in killing him. God is said to have conferred on Her the title "Eka Vira". Parasara rishi was very happy that Maha Vishnu had destroyed the demons and had brought back peace to the asram. He prayed to God and Mahalakshmi to continue to stay in that place. Thus, it is that God is seen as Neelamega Perumal in this divya desam.

In the Tanjai Mamani kovil, even today, we can see one sculpted image in a pose as if it is seeking saranagathi at the feet of the Perumal. It is said that this image is that of Tanjakan, the demon who fell at the feet of Perumal and sought forgiveness. It is said that during Kiruta yugam, Manu had a son. He was a great devotee of Vishnu. He used to undertake a vow of silence for a long period when he would be immersed in praying to the Lord. On one such occasion, a rishi came to meet him. The son of Manu, however, did not pay the respect due to that rishi. The rishi went back to his asram. Manu, who heard about this incident, cursed his son and said that he be born as an asura. Hearing this, the wife of Manu came rushing and requested Manu to lessen the severity of the curse. Manu said that while he could not withdraw the curse, he would modify to the extent of saying that even as an asura, he would be killed only by Vishnu and would attain moksha at that time. It is said that Tanjakan, the demon was that son of Manu.

The Tanjai Mamani kovil was shifted from a place known as Vambulal Salai to its present location at Vennatrancarai during the reign of the Maratta king Tulasa between 1763-1787. The same king is also reported to have shifted the Mel Singa Perumal i.e. Narasimha swamy koil from Melveli thottam (the

place where the Singa Perumal tank now exists) to its present location near Tanjai Mamani kovil. The Mani kunram temple was also previously located in Kalimedu village and later shifted to its present location near Vennatrancarai in between the two temples of Neelamega Perumal and Melsinga Perumal temple. As it is located in between these two temples, this temple is also known in Tamil as 'Nadu kovil' i.e. middle temple.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alwar, Bhoothath Alwar and Nammalwar respectively have sung 3 and 1 pasuram each in praise of this divya desam.

Bhoothath Alwar:

தமருள்ளும் தஞ்சை தலையரங்கம் தண்கால்
தமருள்ளும் தண்பொருப்பு வேலை - தமருள்ளும்
மாமல்லலை கோவில் மதிள் குடந்தை என்பரே
ஏவல்ல எந்தைக் கிடம்.

Meaning:

The places

Which are fit for stay of the Perumal who destroys the enemies of His devotees

Are -

The minds of His devotees;

The Tanjai Mamani kovil

The famous Srirangam;

The Thiru Thanka temple at Kanchipuram;

The Thiruvengadam hills ever in the minds of devotees;

Thiruparkadal;

Thiru Mamallapuram;

Thiru Kovaloor;

Thirukudanthai which is full of enchanting clouds.

Nammalvar - Thiruvai mozhi 5-3-1

Pasuram:

மாசறு சோதி என் செய்வாய் மணிக் குன்றத்தை
ஆசறு சேனை ஆதி மூர்த்தியே நாடியே

பாசற வெய்தி அறிவிழந்து எனை நாளையம்
எசனும் ஊரவர் சுவைவ தோழி! என் செய்யுமே.

Meaning:

I have lost all my beauty and my sense of shame -
Waiting and searching for my Lord.
How long am I to be patient?
My Lord has a beautiful red mouth
He is a Purana purusha (ageless)
He is blemishless;
He is enchantingly beautiful like a precious mountain of
emeralds.
He is absolutely noble with priceless qualities.
What harm can come out of the enmity and jealousy of the
people who seem to have been born only to find fault with
us?

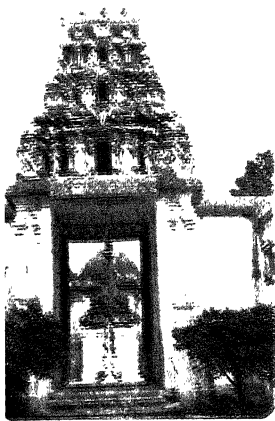
Tirumangai Alwar - Peria Thirumozhi 1-1-6

Pasuram:

எம்பிரான் எந்தை என்னுடையச் சுற்றம்
எனக் கரசு என்னுடை வாணுள்
அம்பினால் அரக்கர் வெருக் கொள நெருக்கி
அவருயிர் செகுத்த எம் அண்ணல்
வம்புலாம் சோலை மாமதிள் தஞ்சை
மாமணிக் கோயிலே வணங்கி
நம்பிகாள் உய்ய நான் கண்டு கொண்டேன்
நாராயண என்னும் நாமம்.

Meaning:

Oh You faithful devotees
I have learnt that the secret, effective mantra which will
enable us to attain the eternal bliss
Is
To pray to the Lord at Tanjai Mamani Kovil - which place is
full of scented groves;

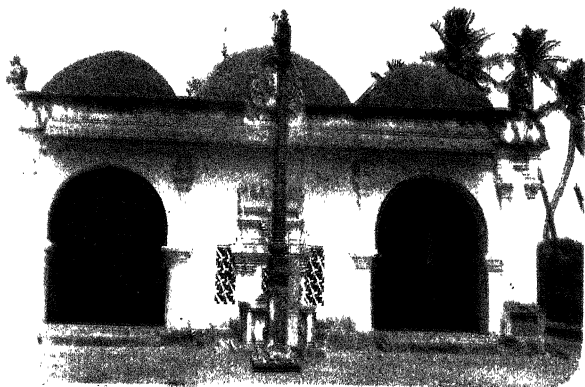


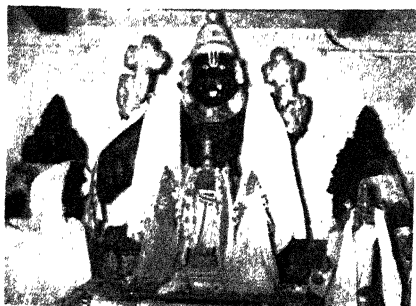
Thiru Thanjai Maamanikovil
Gopuram View



Thiru Thanjai Maamanikovil
Temple View

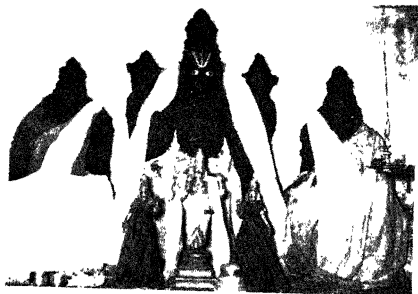
Thiru Thanjai Maamanikovil - Temple View





Thiru Thanjai Maamanikovil
Sri Narasimhar Moolavar & Utsavars

Thiru Thanjai Maamanikovil
Sri Neelamega Perumal
Moolavar & Utsavars



Thiruppaer Nagar - Utsavamurthis

TIRUPPER NAGAR (KOILADI)

This is another of the divya desams in Tanjore District. It is five miles from Anbil. It can also be reached from Kumbakonam. It is on the Thiruvaiyaru-Thirukkattupalli Kallanai road. It is also about 15 miles from Tiruchi. The place is more popularly known as Koyiladi rather than Thirupper Nagar. The moolavar here is known as Appa Kudathan as also Adi Ranganatha. He is seen in a bhujanga sayanam pose. God is seen here with His hand placed on the head of Markandeya as if He is blessing him. At the same time, the arm is also holding an appa kudam i.e. a vessel filled with appams, a sweet eatable. He appeared before Markandeya rishi and Uparisaravasu King. The Thayar is known as Indira Devi and Kamalavalli. The theertham is known as Indira theertham. The vimanam is known as Indira vimanam.

The sthala puranam is related in Brahmanda puranam by Veda Vyasa to Jaimini Maharishi.

Perumal is here known as Adi Ranganatha as He is said to have appeared and stayed in this place even before he went to Srirangam. The place got the name as Tirupper nagar as Goddess Mahalakshmi is believed to have stayed here for a long time. Thiru is a holy prefix which is usually used to refer to the Perumal or the Goddess. It is said that once there was a kalaham (i.e. misunderstanding) created by sage Narada as to who among the two Thayars viz. Mahalakshmi and Bhoodevi was greater. Perumal decided to resolve this issue by setting the two Goddesses on the two sides of a Balance or Scale. The pan holding Bhoomidevi is said to have gone down while that holding Lakshmidēvi went up. Thus, the weighty problem was resolved; but not to the satisfaction of Goddess Mahalakshmi who got annoyed. She therefore left Vaikuntam, went to Palasa vanam, to Indra Kshetram and did severe penance in order to prove her supremacy. In course of time, God appeared before her and pleased with her prayer is said to have convinced Her saying that as He is having Lakshmi Thayar on His chest all the time, She is superior to Bhoodevi.

Yet another story connected with this place details as to why the hill and the theertham in this place got named as Indra hill and Indra theertham. It is said that Lord Indra did penance here to Narayana and was able to get rid of his dosha and regained his lost kingdom. One day, Indra was enjoying himself by taking a ride on his favourite mount Iravatham. He was followed by apsaras and devas. The divine dundubi i.e. music was also being played. At that time, Durvasa maharishi son of Athri maharishi was coming in the opposite direction. He was holding in his hand a garland which had earlier been given to him by Goddess Parvati. When Durvasa and his followers met Indra, Durvasa offered the garland that he was carrying in his hand to Indra. Instead of getting down from the elephant and receiving the garland after paying obeisance to the Maharishi, Indra is said to have been in a haughty mood and continued to sit on the elephant. He received the garland with his left hand. What was more, he placed the garland on the head of his elephant Iravatham. The elephant not knowing the value of the garland pulled it down with its trunk, pushed it beneath its feet and crushed it playfully. Durvasa got very angry at all these irreverential acts. He cursed that Indra should lose his wealth, kingdom etc. The asuras who heard of this felt very happy. They fought with the devas, defeated them and occupied Devaloka. Devas had to seek refuge in the caves of Mandara hill. A number of years passed by. Indra felt very sad and repentant. He approached Brahma and asked him as to what he should do to get over this sin of having offended a rishi. Brahma advised him to go to Indra bhavanam and worship the Perumal at that place. Indra accordingly went to the forest. He created a tank. The water was very very clear. He used to have his bath daily in that tank and then worship the Lord. The tank therefore came to be known as Indra theertham. One day he heard an asareeri voice telling him that the Lord was pleased with his sincere prayers. The voice directed him to approach Lord Siva who would advise him on the method for regaining his lost wealth. Accordingly, all the devas who were hiding in the caves, went with Indra to Kailash and met Lord Siva. Lord Siva then told him that their problems would be resolved only if they could get amrutham out of the ocean and drink that amrutham and become immortals. They were wondering as to how best the

ocean could be churned. Lord Siva, Indra and other devas went to Satya loka and consulted Brahma. All of them decided to approach Lord Narayana for a solution to this tricky problem. When approached, Perumal advised them to churn the ocean with the help of the Mandara mountain and using Vasuki the snake as the rope. Accordingly, after a lot of churning, many auspicious and inauspicious things emerged out of the ocean. Finally, amrutham was got. The devas and the asuras started quarreling among themselves as to who should partake of this amrutham. Lord Narayana again had to come to the rescue of the devas. He took on the form of Mohini and by a clever ruse distributed the amrutham only to the devas. Thus, the devas became powerful. They were able to defeat the asuras and regain their lost kingdom. As Indra was able to atone for his sin and regained his lost kingdom after praying to Lord Narayana here, the pushkarini is known as Indra pushkarini, the place is known as Indra bhavanam and the hill here is known as Indra malai. It is believed that even today whoever has a bath in the Indra pushkarini and sincerely prays to the Lord Narayana here will have all his wishes fulfilled.

Yet another story connected with this divya desam relates to Uparisaravasu, the Pandyan king. One day, Uparisaravasu went on a hunt. He saw a huge elephant destroying the forest. He chased that elephant. The elephant rushed towards Gouthama maharishi's asramam. The king let lose a sharp arrow. It hurt the elephant. The elephant then rushed towards a tank full of water. In that tank, a brahmin by name Susarma was doing his penance and dyanam. He was standing in waist deep water inside the tank. The elephant which almost ran stepped into the tank and stepped on the brahmin who was doing penance. The king let lose another arrow on the elephant. The elephant fell down dead. But in the meantime, the elephant had also crushed the brahmin. Uparisaravasu realised that he had committed brahmahathi, though it be inadvertently. The king was very sad. He gave up his kingdom and started wandering around the world visiting the various pilgrim centres. In course of time, he reached Indra bhavana kshetram i.e. Tirupper nagar. He undertook severe penance. Lord Siva was pleased with this penance of the king. He appeared before him and said that he

would grant him any boon he desired. Immediately, the Pandya Raja Uparisaravasu said that he wanted to attain moksha, and get rid of Brahmahathi dosha. Lord Siva said that long ago there was a famous Sivalaya in Indra Bhavaa kshetram, but in course of time when a pralayam had occurred the temple was lost. Lord Siva advised the king to rebuild the temple. He also initiated the king into the prayer taught by Brahma to Indra earlier when the latter had to get over his Brahmahathi dosha when he killed Virithirasuran. Lord Siva advised the king to repeat that mantram atleast 1008 times and he assured him that he would be blessed. He also asked the king to continue to stay in that place and do annadanam to the brahmins by offering food along with appam, ghee and payasam. He advised him to pray to Lord Narayana in that place. He assured him that in response to his sincere prayers, Lord Narayana would appear and grant him moksha. Uparisaravasu requested Lord Siva to continue to stay in the same Indra Bhavana kshetram and help him from time to time with suitable advice. Uparisaravasu rebuilt the temple and would offer the food to Perumal first and then distribute it among the brahmins. A number of years passed. Pleased with this selfless service, Lord Narayana decided that it was time to come to this kshetram not only to grant moksha to Uparisaravasu but also to answer the prayers of Mahalakshmi who, as stated earlier in this chapter, had come down to this place so as to establish her greatness over 'Bhoomidevi.

Lord Narayana decided to have a leela of His own. He took on the guise of an old man, bent double with age, holding a stick in his hand with grey hair straggling on his head and a weak trembling voice. He appeared before Uparisaravasu and requested for food immediately as he was very tired. The king pitied the old brahmin. He however said that while the food was ready, he was waiting for the brahmins who were customarily fed by him everyday. He said that those brahmins had gone for their bath in Gayathri river and would be returning shortly. He requested the old brahmin also to go there, have his bath and on his return would be fed sumptuously. The old brahmin became annoyed. He told the king that he had already had his bath and that he had also finished his mid-day pooja. He was feeling very tired and exhausted. He asked the king not to waste any

more time and to give him food immediately. The Pandya Raja was in a dilemma. He did not want to feed him before the other brahmins returned from the river after their bath. Realising this dilemma, the old man standing in the presence of the king said that he also represented a number of brahmins. Suddenly the king saw not one old man but thousands of brahmins in the place of that one old brahmin. The old man said that by feeding him, he would get the same punyam that he hoped to get through feeding all the other rishis and siddhars who had gone to the river for their bath. The Pandya Raja was convinced by what he saw and heard. He washed the feet of the old brahmin, seated him on an asana and gave him food. God wanted to test the king further. He virtually consumed the entire food prepared for the hundreds of brahmins. There was nothing left. But he appeared as if only part of his hunger was satisfied. Uparisaravasu started trembling. He prayed to Narayana in his mind and asked him for protection. He told the servants to prepare more food. In the meantime, the king requested the old brahmin to take rest till more food was served to him. The old man said that he had walked a long distance, he wanted to lie down till such time as food was prepared and asked the king to prepare a bed. While God was resting on the bed, Uparisaravasu prepared appams with a great deal of bhakthi, brought it and palced it before the old brahmin. He had brought this in a big kudam i.e. vessel and requested the old man to accept the appams. The old man put his hand and held the vessel close to him. He then appeared before Pandya Raja in all His glory. He said that his prayers were answered and that he would attain moksham. Hence it is said that whoever has a bath in Indra pushkarini and does annadanam in this place each according to his financial capacity would definitely be blessed by Adi Ranganatha.

Yet another story connected with this place relates to the manner in which Markandeya rishi got longevity conferred on him through his sincere prayers to Lord Narayana here. Markandeya was the son of Mirukandu rishi. As soon as the boy was born, the rishi realised that he would live for only sixteen years. When the boy came of age, the rishi told him that he had only two more years to live, he advised him to offer sincere prayers in order to get over this impending calamity.

He advised him to go to Palasa vanam, visit Appakudathan kshetram first, pray to lord Mahadeva who would suitably advise him. Hearing these words of his father, Markandeya rishi went to Palasa vanam, had his bath in Indra pushkarini and prayed sincerely to Lord Siva for a long time. One day pleased with his penance, Lord Siva appeared before him in the form of a swan. The boy was in deep meditation. The swan started fanning the boy with its wings and asked him as to the cause for the severe penance. Markandeya felt that his prayers were needlessly interrupted and told the swan that it could not help him. He said that even Indra could not grant him his wish and he therefore felt that the swan need not waste his time in trying to find out the reason for his penance. The swan then said that he was an unusual bird, that he was the king of the swans, that he lived in Saithra ratham which was a part administered by Kubera in Devaloka, that he lived in a tank by name Manatham in Saithra ratham. The tank was said to be golden in colour filled with flowers. The swan said that there was no country in the three worlds which he did not know. He asked the boy to share his worry and that he would try to solve it. Ultimately, he said that he could even release him from the clutches of Yama. On hearing this, Markandeya rishi told the swan his problems. He said that he came to this kshetram as advised by his father to pray to Lord Siva. The rishi also added that as the swan had promised to save him from Yama, he felt that his prayers to Lord Siva were answered. Siva was pleased with this. He appeared before him in his true form and advised him to pray to Lord Narayana. He told him one mantra which he said was very effective and which would act as a kavacham even against the Yama kinkaras. The kavacham told by Siva to Markandeya rishi is as follows:

Kesava, please guard my head,

Narayana, please guard my hair

Madhava, please guard my forehead.

Govinda, please guard my eyes

Vishnu, Madhusudhana, please guard my nostrils and the ears,

Thirvikrama please guard my neck

Vamanan and Sridhalan, please guard my two lips

Hrishikesa, please guard my teeth,
Padmanaba, please guard my tongue
Damodara, please guard the two shoulders,
Shankarshana, please guard my chest,
Vasudeva, please guard my stomach
Pradhyumna, please guard my back,
Aniruddha, please guard the two sides,
Purushothama, please guard my waist
Narasimha, please guard the two thighs,
Achutha, please guard my two knees,
Janardhana, please guard the kanukkal, (ankles)
Upendra, please guard my feet,
Hari, please guard the toes,
Krishna, please guard my entire body.

As advised by Lord Siva, the boy used to have his bath in the pushkarini and then offer this Bagavat kavacham prayer to Lord Narayana. Siva also told him that the tank was known as Nithya pushkarini. Siva said that the pushkarini was the place where Bali Chakravarthi also had his daily bath before praying to Perumal. Lord Siva said that as Bali Chakravarthi had his bath daily in this pushkarini and attained moksha later, this tank fame to be known as Nithya pushkarini.

As advised by Siva, Markandeya rishi had his daily bath in the Nithya pushkarini and repeated the Bagavat kavacham. In course of time, as scheduled, the demoniac looking Yama doothars messengers with claw like teeth came holding the noose of death in their hands to drag Markandeya to hell. Markandeya continued to repeat the Bhagavat kavacham. When they heard the name of Kesava being repeated, the Yama doothars felt helpless. They went back to Yama, informed him that they could not complete the assigned task. Yama was very angry. He himself came. Seeing Yama, Markandeya rishi appealed to Lord Siva again and told him that he had repeated the kavacham as advised by Him that it was upto Him now to save him. Lord Siva appeared before him and advised him to follow his instructions implicitly. Lord Siva said that Perumal had taken on the form

of an old brahmin and was at that very time sleeping in the house of Pandya Raja Uparisaravas. He advised Markandeya rishi to go there and beg of him to bless the rishi. Meantime, He promised to keep Yama at bay. Accordingly, the rishi went to the house of Pandya Raja Uparisaravas. As stated by Lord Siva, he saw the old brahmin lying on a couch. The old man was holding in one hand appa kudam very lovingly. Markandeya approached Him and as directed by Paramasiva, bowed before him 100 times. The old brahmin lifted the hand from the appakudam and blessed Markandeya rishi with longevity. As Markandeya rishi got his longevity here, the nithya pushkarini where he used to have his daily bath came to be also known as Mruthyu vinasini.

Epigraphical Highlights:

The antiquity of the place which figured largely in the Carnatic wars of the 18th century is evidenced by the number of inscriptions that have been discovered in this temple.

On the eastern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in Ranganatha temple, there is a record relating to the 14th year of the Pandyan king Maravarman which records the gift of money for offerings to the Perumal. ¹

On the eastern wall of the central shrine in the same temple, there is a record relating to S.1485 which records gifts to the temple by a certain Tatacharya of Srirangam. ²

On the same wall, there is a record relating to the period of the Vijayanagara king Sadasiva Raya in S.1467. It says that the king's representative in the South and the leader of the campaign in the South one Vittaladeva Maharaja gave some gifts to the temple. ³

On the northern wall of the mandapa in front of the central shrine in the Divya Gnaneswarar temple, there is a record of the Pandya king Jatavarman. This records a sale of land. ⁴

¹ 270 ARIE 1902

² 272 ARIE 1902

³ 273 ARIE 1901

⁴ 275 ARIE 1901

On the southern wall of the same mantapa, there is a record in the 11th year of the Chola king Tribhuvanachakravartin Vikrama Chola Deva also recording a gift of land. On the same wall, there is a record relating to the 44th year of the Chola King Rajakesarivarman which records the sale of land. ⁵

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the same temple there is a record relating to the third year of the Chola King Parakesarivarman alias Rajendra Choladeva I, which also records a gift of land. ⁶

On the western wall of the same shrine also there is an inscription which records that in the third year of the reign of the Chola King Rajakesarivarman, there was a gift of land. ⁷

Hymnology:

Four Alwars have sung in praise of the Lord here. Perialwar has sung two pasurams, Thirumangai Alwar has sung 19 pasurams, Tirumalisai Alwar has sung one pasuram and Nammalwar has sung 11 pasurams.

Tirumangai Alwar Peria Thirumozhi 5-9-1

Pasuram:

கையிலங்காழி சங்கன் கருமுகில் திருநிறத்தன்
பொய்யிலன் மெய்யன் தன் தாளடைவரேல் அடிமை
யாக்கும்
செய்யலர் கமலமோங்கு செறிபொழில் தென் திருப்பேர்
பையரவணையான் நாமம் பரவி நான் உய்ந்தவாறே

Meaning:

The Lord holds the Sankhu (conch) and chakra (disc) in His hands;

All the lovable glorious traits attributed to Him in the holy texts are no exaggeration;

He reveals all those traits to His sincere devotees;

He never fails to help all those who absolutely surrender at His feet;

⁵ 277 ARIE 1901

⁶ 278 ARIE 1901

⁷ 281 ARIE 1901

He is seen lying on the serpent couch at Thirupaernagar - which town is full of verdant groves and tanks full of lotus flowers.

I have chanted the myriad names of that Lord and attained supreme satisfaction and bliss.

(Alwar conveys the significance of chanting the namavali of God).

Perialwar Thirumozhi 2-6-2

Pasuram:

கொங்குங் குடந்தையும் கோட்டியூரும் பேரும்

எங்கும் திரிந்து விளையாடும் என் மகன்

சங்கம் பிடிக்கும் தடக்கையுக்கு தக்க நல்

அங்கமுடையதோர் கோல் கொண்டுவா

அரக்கு வழித்ததோர் கோல் கொண்டுவா

Meaning:

Oh bring a stick (kol) -

A red attractive one -

for my beloved son Kannan who is playing about in beautiful places like Thirukudanthai, Thiru Koshtiyur and Thirupaernagar.

Please do not forget that the stick should be fit enough to be held by the hand which holds Panchajanyam (the conch).

(Here Alwar takes on the role of Yasodha the mother. She is said to be calling her little boy Krishna to come to her and allow his hair to be combed, plaited and adorned with flowers. The child is playing lovingly truant and is more engrossed in his games and is not willing to be disturbed. So the typical mother is trying to tempt him with an attractive alternative and is therefore addressing a crow, within the hearing of her son, to get him a bright red beautiful captivating stick so that the child will come running to the mother to collect the stick which he can use for herding the cows. This Alwar always enjoys the Lord by putting himself in the role of a mother. Apparently for him a mother's love to the child is the best vehicle for depicting man's yearning for God).

Nammalwar Thiruvaimozhi 10-8-2*Pasuram :*

பேரே யுறைகின்ற பிரான் இன்று வந்து
 பேரேனென்று என்னெஞ்சது நிறையப் புருந்தான்
 காரேழ் கடலேழ் மலையேழுலகுண்டும்
 ஆரா வயிற்றானை அடங்கப் பிடித்தேனே.

Meaning:

The God who likes to reside at Thirupaernagar has today, of His own sweet will and pleasure, chosen to make my heart His home. He says He will never leave that place as He is very happy and satisfied with it.

Once upon a time when the great deluge (Pralayam) occurred, in order to save the creation He swallowed the seven oceans, seven mountains, seven worlds etc. and yet His hunger was not satisfied. But today I hold Him captive in my heart but I am absolutely happy and satisfied.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108**Tirupathi Andadi:****Poem:**

போமானை எய்து பொருமானைக் கொம்பு பறித்து
 ஆமானை மேய்த்து உவந்த அம்மானைத் - தாமச்
 செழுந்திருப் பேரானை சிறுமகாலைச் சிந்தித்து
 எழுந்திருப்பேற்கு உண்டோ இடர்.

Meaning:

Can I be ever troubled by any of the sorrows of this world. When every day very early in the morning even as I wake up from my sleep I think of that Perumal Who -

In His avatar as Rama let loose an arrow and killed Maricha the demon who came disguised as a golden deer Who - In His avatar as Krishna fought with the mighty elephant known as Kuvalaya pedam, plucked its tusks and killed it and Who -

happily grazed a number of cattle like a cowherd and Who is residing at Thirupaernagar.

(He says that in Brahma muhurtham i.e. ushasakalam one should wake up with thoughts of God only).

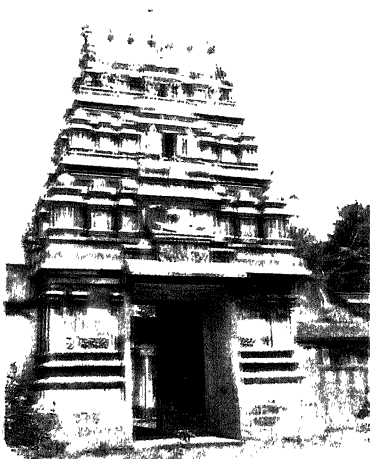
THIRU AADANOOR

Aadanoor is a divya desam in Tanjore District. It is about 1 km. from Thiru Pullamboothangudi, yet another vaishnavite divya desam of Chola Nadu. This place is also near Swamimalai, the famous shrine for Lord Subramanya. The place is known as Bharghava kshetram. It is also known as Simhapuram, Sanjeevipuram. It is believed that this temple was built by Aditya Cholan.

The moolavar here is known as Andu Alakkum Ayyan. In Tamil, literally translated, this word means that He is the Perumal who measures time and world. He is the person who is the perfect controller of the past, the present and the future. He is seen in a bhujanga sayana posture with His lovely head resting on a marakkal which is again a Tamil word indicating a unit of measure. Marakkal can said to represent a bushel. The Perumal is facing east. The moolavar Thayar is known as Kamalavasini as also Bhargavi, Mantrapeeteswari, Sri Chakra Nivasini. The utsava Thayar is known as Ranganayaki. The theerthams are known as Surya and Chandra pushkarini. The vimanam is Pranava vimanam.

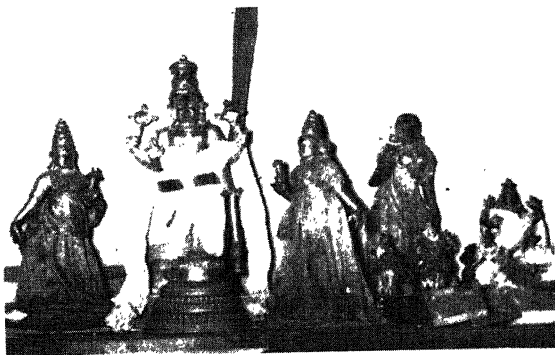
It is said that in this desam Perumal gave dharshan to Kamadhenu, the celestial cow, Brighu Maharishi, Agni Baghavan and to Thirumangai Alwar.

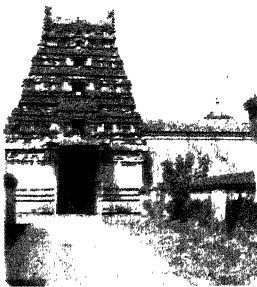
Once upon a time when God was in paramapada, the nityasuris were troubling Him a lot. In order to get away from them, God is said to have come to this place viz. Aadanoor to rest. It is said that in a huff God left Paramapadam and came down on His own unaccompanied either by Thayar or by Adisesha. Realising that God had left Paramapadam, Thayar sent Adisesha to earth to search for the Perumal. When Adisesha met Him at Aadanoor, he found that God was tired and lying down on the ground. Adisesha, His divine couch felt very upset at this and demanded of God an explanation as to why he should have given up His heavenly abode and also lie down on earth when Adisesha was only too willing to provide the comfortable couch. God is then said to have asked Adisesha



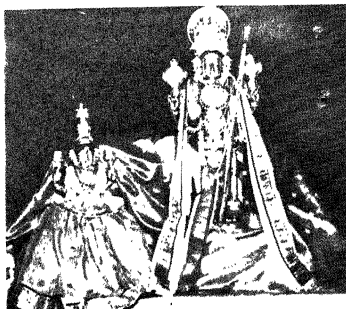
Thiru Aadanoor - Gopuram View

Thiru Aadanoor - Utsavamurthis



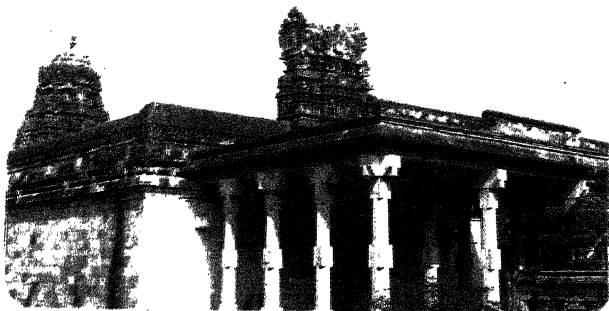


Thiru Nandipura Vinnagaram
Gopuram View



Thiru Nandipura Vinnagaram
Utsavamurthi

Thiru Nandipura Vinnagaram - Temple View



to give proof that he is truly Adishesha and not some other Sarpa Raja. Adishesha then subjected himself to the scrutiny of God. Perumal is said to have performed samasrayam to Adishesha. Samasrayam is a vaishnavite function which is also known as "mudra dharanam" when the vaishnavite hall marks of Shanku and Chakra are imprinted on the shoulders of the devotee. In this place, we find that on the inside portion of the hood of Adishesha, the sankhu and chakra marks are seen. This is an unusual sight. It is therefore believed that Adishesha was initiated into vaishnavism by Perumal Himself at this place. This story has no basis in any of the puranas. But the karna parampara varalaru i.e. story repeated by word of mouth from generation to generation continues to mention this incident and even today the priests while offering worship to the Perumal here mention this incident.

God is said to have appeared in response to the prayers of Kamadhenu. The story of extraction of amrith from the ocean is well known. The Mandara mountain was used as the churner. Vasuki, the serpent was used as the rope for rotating the churner. The Devas and Asuras on either side churned the mighty ocean. After halahala, the poison and then Jyeshta Devi, Evil Goddess emerged out of the ocean, the auspicious things like Kamadhenu, Kalpaviruksham, Iravatham, Dhanvantri etc., emerged out of the ocean. Finally, Mahalakshmi Herself emerged. It is said that one day, Kamadhenu, the celestial cow felt that as she had preceded Mahalakshmi in the creation from the ocean, she should be given precedence over the Thayar. She approached Perumal and expressed her desire. God is then said to have asked her to weigh and measure her ishwaraya with that of the Thayar. He then proffered the marakkal i.e. the measuring unit under his head to Kamadhenu. Kamadhenu filled the marakkal with herself as well as the good qualities possessed by her. But even then the measuring unit did not get filled up. The God then requested Mahalakshmi to measure Her ishwarayam with the same marakkal. Goddess then offered sincere prayer and lifted a tulasi leaf from the garland around the neck of Perumal and placed the leaf in the measuring unit i.e. marakkal. It is said that the marakkal overflowed with the ishwarayam deposited in it by Thayar. Kamadhenu then realised

the foolishness of its claim. Kamadhenu did severe penance at the same place seeking forgiveness of both the Thayar and the Perumal. God is said to have appeared before Kamadhenu and appreciated her penance and forgave her. In the moolastanam, in the garbagriha, we find the Kamadhenu along with her calf Nandhini pictured on the wall near the feet of the Perumal. It is said that the celestial cow and its calf received the blessing of the Perumal in this divya desam.

Another story connected with this divyadesam explains why this place got the name Bhargava kshetram. Once upon a time, Indra was proceeding in the celestial highways seated on his chariot elephant Iravatham. Enroute, he met Durvasa Maharishi. Durvasa rishi gave Indra a garland which he had received earlier from the Goddess. Indra, in his arrogance, received this garland in his left hand and put it round the head of the elephant Iravatham. The elephant not realising the sanctity attached to the garland pulled it down with its trunk and trampled on it with its leg. Seeing this, Durvasa got annoyed and he cursed that Indra should loose his kingdom and all his wealth. Indra realised his mistake too late. He rushed to Perumal and Thayar and prayed to them to redeem him of his curse. The Thayar then asked him to go to Aadanoor and pray to Her. She said that she would be born as the daughter of Brighu Maharishi at Aadanoor and that when the Perumal comes down to Aadanoor to claim Her hand in marriage, Indra could meet Her and at that time, he would be redeemed of his sin. Meantime, Bhargava Rishi was also doing severe penance at Aadanoor. One day, he found a female child in all its shining glory lying near the tank. He collected the child and brought her up as his own daughter. As she was the daughter of the Bhargava rishi, she was known as Bhargavi. In entire Tamilnadu, there are only two places viz. Thiruvahindrapuram and Aadanoor where the Goddess is known as Bhargavi. When Bhargavi came of age, Perumal came and requested Bhargava rishi to celebrate His wedding with the Thayar. It is believed that this place is known as Bhargava kshetram as Bhargava Maharishi did his prayer here and was blessed with having the Thayar Bhargavi as his daughter and the Perumal as his son-in-law. It is also said that Indra came to this place, prayed to Mahalakshmi and

as promised earlier, Mahalakshmi cast Her kindly glance on Indra which enabled him to recover all his lost glory, riches and kingdom.

It is believed that this place is also the *sapa vimochana sthalam* for Agni Baghavan. That is to say Agni Baghavan got redeemed of his curse by offering prayers to the Perumal at Aadanoor. Long ago, Brahma who was suffering from Brahmahatty dosha celebrated Sona yagam and got himself redeemed of his dosha. But Agni Baghavan who helped in performing this yaga, got afflicted by the curse. He therefore offered prayers to Perumal to rid him of his impurity. In the garbagriha, next to the picture of Kamadhenu on the wall, the picture of Agni Baghavan is seen. The Agni Baghavan has two faces one that of a lady and the other that of a man. The Agni Baghavan also has three feet representing the three types of agni viz. Ahwaneeyam, Garhapathyam and Dakshinagni. In the garbagriha, on the wall near the feet of Perumal one can recognise the picture of Agni Baghvan who had received the blessing of the God at this place.

A unique feature of this place is that Thirumangai Alwar has a place within the sanctum sanctorum itself. In most of the temples, Thirumangai Alwar has no separate shrine for himself. He will be seen along with the other Alwars or Acharyas in a mandapam or a niche in the corridor etc. In very few places, does this Alwar have a separate shrine for himself. For example, in Varadaraja Perumal koil at Kanchipuram and at Therezhundur in Tanjore District in Chola Nadu, there are separate shrines for Thirumangai Alwar. But even in Therezhundur the shrine is outside the temple of Aamaruviyappan. But in Aadanoor, the Alwar has a place within the sanctum sanctorum itself. He is seen brandishing the sword. To explain the presence of the sword in the hands of Thirumangai Alwar's idol in the garbagriha, an interesting story is told. It is said that after having spent a lot of effort time and money for renovating and improving the temple at Srirangam, Thirumangai Alwar was tired. He spent sometime in this village. One day, in his dream, the Perumal appeared and said that many who had served the Perumal had acquired riches and that it was enigmatic as to why the Alwar who had done so much of service to the Perumal

was yet not rich. The Perumal is said to have told the Alwar in his dream that the next day, he should go to the banks of the Kollidam river and that a person who appears there would confer wealth on the Alwar. The next day morning, the Alwar along with the various others went to the bank of the Kollidam river. He saw a majestic figure standing there with a measuring unit i.e. marakkal in His hand. On seeing Alwar, he gave a bushel full of mud to the Alwar. But the moment the Alwar received it, it became gold. The others who had done no service to the Perumal but who had assembled there out of curiosity perhaps wanted to partake of this bonanza and stretched out their hands. God is said to have given them also measures of mud from his marakkal. But the mud remained as mud. It is said that those disappointed recipients did not realise the significance of this gesture of God, but were ready to attack the donor who was none other than Perumal. Thirumangai Alwar is said to have brandished his sword to frighten away the disappointed but disgruntled crowd. It is said that the Alwar is representing in the garbagriha with one hand brandishing the sword as proof of this incident.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alwar in his Peria Thirumadal has sung only one pasuram about the Perumal of this divyadesam. He is also the only Alwar who has sung in praise of this God.

Pasuram:

மூழிக் களத்து விளக்கினை,
அன்னவனை ஆதனூர் ஆண்டனக்கும் ஐயனை
நென்னலை இன்றினை நாடளைய

Meaning:

The God who is residing at Thirumozhikalam (a malai nattu Tirupathi) is staying also in Adanoor. He is staying for ever in Thiru Aadanoor.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's

Poem from 108 Tirupathi Andadi is given below:

Poem:

இடரான ஆக்கை இருக்க முயலார்
மடவார் மயக்கில் மயங்கார் - கடவுளர்க்கு
நாதனார் ஆதிரியன், நான் எனது என்னார் அமலன்
ஆதனார் எந்தையடியார்.

Meaning:

The devotees of the Perumal at Aadanoor
Who is blemishless and perfect.

Will never put in any efforts to save this ephemeral body
which is ever subject to afflictions by worldly ills and sorrows;
and

They will never fall a prey to the wily ways of women and be
caught in the net of base passion; and They will never even
wish to enjoy the pleasures of Indra's heaven; and
They will never utter words like 'I' and 'mine' which are
verily despicably self adulatory and egoistic.

* * *

THIRU NANDIPURA VINNAGARAM

This is also one of the Chola Nadu divya desams in Tanjore District. It is known as Nathan koil as also Dakshina Jagannath. It is known as Dakshina Jagannath as this is a temple in the South for Jagannath while the famous Jagannath temple is at Puri in Orissa. This place is three miles southwest of Kumbakonam railway station. The moolavar here is known variedly as Jagannathan, Nandhi Nathan, as also Vinnagara Perumal. He is seen in a sitting posture facing West. The Thayar is known as Shenbagavalli Thayar. The pushkarini is known as Nandi theertha pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Mandara vimanam. God appeared before Nandhi and Sibhi in response to their prayers.

It is said that Nandhi, the vahanam of Lord Siva prayed in this place and got relieved of his curse. Hence it is that this place is known as Nandipuram and the God is known as Nandhinathan. In the moolasthanam, on the wall on the left side one can see the figure of Adhikara Nandhi. It is also said that Nandivarman, the king built this town and the temple. Thirumangai Alwar in one of his pasurams refers to this place as "Nandi pani seidha nagar". Yet another story connected with this divya desam is relating to the manner in which Sibhi Chakravarthi helped a dove. The story is quite well known but yet bears repetition in a shortened form in order to give the necessary backdrop to this divya desam. Sibhi was an emperor who was well known for his generosity and sense of justice. One day while he was sitting in the royal court, a dove came rushing and fell at his feet seeking protection from a vulture which was chasing the dove. Sibhi then intervened on behalf of the dove and asked the vulture to give up the poor dove. The vulture then said that the dove was its lawful prey for food. Sibhi then offered flesh equal to the weight of the dove from his own thigh. He brought a balance, put the dove on one side and cut a piece of flesh from his body and placed it on the other scale. But curiously the weight of the dove seemed to be more than any amount of flesh that Sibhi offered. Finally without any hesitation, Sibhi said that he would offer himself in lieu of the dove and seated himself on one side of the

scale. Seeing this unhesitating spontaneous act of generosity, Perumal appeared before him and blessed him. It is also said that the dove was none other than Indra and the vulture was Agni Bhagavan and they enacted that small drama to test the veracity of the fame that Sibhi Chakravarthy enjoyed as one who is generous in his actions. Sibhi came out with flying colours from that agni pariksha. It is said that originally the God in this divya desam was facing East. But when the unbelievable incident took place, the moolavar is said to have turned his head to witness this incident of Sibhi and the balance. Hence it is that today the God who was originally facing eastward is said to be facing westward! This sannidhi is under the control and overall supervision of the Vanamamalai mutt.

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alwar has sung ten pasurams in praise of the God here. One amongst the pasurams with its meaning is given below:

Tirumangai Alwar-Peria Thirumozhi 5-10-8

எண்ணில் நினைவெய்தி இனி இல்லை இறை என்று
முனியாளர் திருவார்,
பண்ணில் மலி சீதமொடு பாடி அவர்
ஆடலொரு கூட எழிலார்
மண்ணில் இது போலு நகரில்லை என
வானவர்கள் தாம் மலர்கள் தூய்
நண்ணி உறைகின்ற நகர் நந்திபுர விண்ணகரம்
நண்ணு மனமே.

Meaning:

This is the only God who is fit to be worshipped.

Sanaka and other rishis have through their beautiful songs told us that there is none to surpass this Lord; Devas also have showered flowers on this Lord and have categorically said that in this earth there is no other place to equal this in its holiness. Oh, mind of mine. Realise that this Nandipura Vinnagaram is the place where the devas continue to stay and enjoy the supreme bliss of God realisation.

**Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108
Tirupathi Andadi:**

Poem:

செயற்கரிய செய்வோமைச் செய்யாமல் நெஞ்சே
மயக்குவார் ஐவர் வலியால் - நயக்கலவி சிந்தி
புர விண்ணகரம் என்பர்; திருச் செங்கண் மால்
நந்தி புர விண்ணகர நாடு.

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine please listen -
We are capable of doing great things
But the Panchendriyams (i.e. hands, ear, nose)
with their stranglehold over us
make us think only of petty ephemeral pleasures and
They convince us that we can lord over even
heaven through the pursuit of such pleasures.
Please do not pay heed to such misdirected words;
Instead your sole desire should be to reach
Nandipura Vinnagaram where the Lord with
the bewitchingly beautiful eyes resides.

* * *

THIRU PULLAMBOOTHANGUDI

This is a divya desam in Tanjore District of Chola Nadu. It is about three miles from Swamimalai - a famous pilgrim centre dedicated to Lord Subramania. This temple is under the administrative control of the Ahobila Mutt.

The Moolavar here is known as Valvil Raman. He is seen in a bhujanga sayanam posture facing East. The Thayar is known as Pottramaraiyal as also Hemambujavalli. The theertham is known as Jatayu theertham as also Kruthra theertham. The vimanam is known as Sobana vimanam. God appeared in response to the prayers of Kruthra Rajan and also Thirumangai Alwar.

There is not much of a sthala puranam relating to this divya desam. The Lord when he took on the avatara as Rama, underwent all the sufferings which a human being may have to face while living in this samsara. The way He got over these troubles and turmoils are meant to be the standing examples to guide us in Dharma. Pullamboothangudi is the divya desam where there is a temple for Rama.

The story of Ramayana is well known. The sthala purana of this place is connected with the incident where Rama performed the ceremonies for Jatayu. When they were living in the forest, Sita was taken in by a golden deer which was none other than Maricha, the demon in disguise. She wanted to possess that golden deer. She would not heed the advice given by Rama as well as Lakshmana, that the golden deer was not real and that it must be some evil spirit in disguise. Finally, Rama went to capture the deer. He let loose an arrow on the deer. When it was hurt by the arrow, the golden deer (Maricha) fell and even then let out a plaintive cry "Ha Lakshmana, Ha Sita". This was heard in the parnasala by Sita. She mistook the cry as one of anguish from her Lord who must have been wounded. She virtually forced Lakshmana to go in search of Rama and render assistance to Him. Thus having enticed both Rama and Lakshmana from the parnasala, Ravana, the ten headed demon forcibly carried Sita away. Enroute, the Vulture King, Jatayu saw the divine mother

being forcibly carried by Ravana. He valiantly fought with Ravana, but his two wings were cut. He fell down at the place which is now known as Pullamboothangudi. When Rama and Lakshmana came in search of Sita in due course, they reached this place. They saw Jatayu who was holding on to life only so that he may inform Rama and Lakshmana about Sita's capture and the captor. After having passed on the details the bird died. Rama wanted to perform *sraddha* to the bird. In Thondai mandala also there is one *divya desam* known as Tirupputkuzhi near Kancheepuram where legend has it that Rama performed the obsequies to Jatayu, the bird. Pullamboothangudi is also another place which is linked with this incident in the life of Jatayu. The legend has it that at Pullamboothangudi, Rama did not have Sita by His side. He was wondering as to how He could perform the religious rites without the divine mother by His side. At that time, Bhoomi Devi appeared before Him and acted as a standby for performing the religious rites. Having completed the religious rites, Rama was tired and worried. He lay down. At that time, Thirumangai Alwar is said to have reached the place. He saw these two princes viz. Rama and Lakshmana lying down under the tree. He thought they were some two princes and so without disturbing them, he continued his pilgrimage. Rama saw this. As he was talking away Thirumangai Alwar suddenly felt that his eye sight was growing dim. He was surprised. He therefore turned and again went towards the temple. At that time, Rama appeared before him as Perumal with four hands holding Shanku, Chakra and Gada *ayudhams*. Thus, Perumal even in his human form as Rama, gave *darshan* to Thirumangai Alwar as Vishnu in His divine form at Pullamboothangudi.

The *moolavar* in the *garbagriha* is a very majestic figure about 10 feet in height. He is seen holding the Shanku, Chakra and the mace. As Sita had been captured and taken away by Ravana in this *divyadesam*, Rama is standing alone. Sita is not to be seen by His side. But as Bhoomidevi appeared and helped Rama to perform the obsequies to Jatayu, the idol of Bhoomidevi is seen by the side of the *moolavar*.

In this place God is believed to have appeared before Krudra Raja and hence the *theertham* is known as Krudra *theertham*.

This temple is under the overall supervision and administrative control of the Ahobila Mutt. On the inner walls of the temple the pictures of the various Ahobila Mutt Jeers are painted. The 19th Jeer of Ahobila Mutt Sri Srinivasa Yathindra Mahadesikan has his brindavanam here.

About 1.5 kilometres from Pullamboothangudi, there is a place by name Mandangudi. It is the birth place of Thondaradi Podi Alwar. About another 1 km. from Pullamboothangudi is Aadanoor, which is also one of the Vaishnavite divya desams.

Hymnology:

The only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here is Tirumangai Alwar who has rendered ten pasurams. One of those pasurams is extracted below and given with its meaning.
Peria Tirumozhi - Pasuram (5-1-1)

அறிவதரியான் அனைத்துலகு முடையான்
என்னை யாளுடையான்
குறிய மாணி யருவாய கூத்தன்
மன்னி யமருமிடம்
நறிய மலர்மேல் சுரும்பார்க்க எழிவார்
மஞ்ஞை நடமாட
பொறிகொள் சிறைவண்டு இசைபாடும் புள்ளம்
பூதங்குடிதானே.

Meaning:

The God who resides willingly, happily and permanently at Pullamboothangudi -

Is the one whom none can comprehend fully (i.e. beyond comprehension);

Is the one who is the master of all the worlds;

Is the one who as the diminutive Vamana with

his dainty, petite steps innocently

requested Mahabali to give him land

to be covered by his three steps!

In this beautiful divya desam the Surumbu

(i.e. a high class bee) sits on the scented flowers and even while collecting the honey produces a musical noise - ringaram. Yet another type of bee viz. Pori vandu also goes about its job humming and singing. The peacocks also dance with joy and abandon.

**Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108
Tirupathi Andadi:**

Poem:

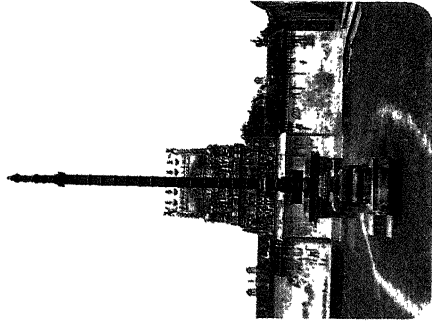
வீரும்பினவை எய்தும் வினையனைத்தும் தீரும்
அரும் பரம வீடும் அடைவீர் - பெரும் பொறி கொள்
கள்ளம் பூதம் குடி கொள் காயமுடையீர் அடிகள்
புள்ளம் பூதம் குடியிற்போம்.

Meaning:

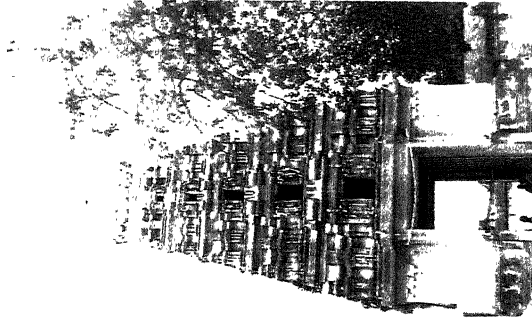
Oh Ye Men!

With bodies of powerful panchendriyas and panchabhutams with the qualities of deception go and worship the Perumal at Pullambothamgudi. Your desires will be fulfilled. All difficulties will vanish. And you will attain moksha.

* * *



Thiru Pullambhoothangudi - Gopuram View



Thiru Pullambhoothangudi - Gopuram View



Thiru Pullambhoothangudi - Valvil Raman Utsavamurthis

Thiru Pullambhoothangudi - Valvil Raman Utsavamurthis



THIRU KAPISTHALAM

(KRISHNARANYA KSHETRAM)

This place is one among the five Krishnaranya kshetrams. This is two miles from Papanasam Railway station in Thanjavur District. The moolavar here is known as Gajendra Varadhan. He is seen in a bhujanga sayana posture facing East. The Goddess is known as Ramamani Valli as also Potramaraiyal. The vimanam is known as Gaganakruti vimanam. God appeared to Lord Anjaneya and Gajendra, the elephant. The pushkarini is known as Gajendra pushkarini as also Kapila pushkarini.

Once upon a time, there was a queen by name Moopi. Her lineal descendents were known as Mooppanars. This divya desam is under the trusteeship of the Mooppanar clan. Once upon a time, the Mooppanar family were poets, scholars and warriors. Hence it is that this place was known as Kavi sthalam i.e. the place of poets. Over a period of time this has got corrupted as Kapisthalam.

Once upon a time, there was a Pandyan king by name Indradyumna. He was a great Vishnu Bhaktha. He entrusted his Kingdom to his ministers and withdrew into the forest to meditate on Vishnu. One day Agastya Muni passed by the parnasala of Indradyumna. The latter was so immersed in his meditation that he did not notice Agastya. Agastya was angry and cursed Indradyumna to become an elephant. Indradyumna became an elephant and roamed about the forest. He became the leader for a herd of elephants and came to be known as Gajendra i.e. King elephant. Even as an elephant he continued to worship Vishnu. He would have his bath in a tank, pluck a lotus flower and offer it to Vishnu. One day a crocodile in the tank caught its foot and was dragging it into the tank. Gajendra then shouted for help to Perumal. God heard His devotee's cry for help and rushed on His Garuda vahanam. He let loose the chakra on the crocodile and killed it. This incident is said to have taken place in this divya desam. Hence it is that the moolavar is known as Gajendra Varadhan.

Epigraphical Highlights:

A copper plate dated S.1349 relating to the period of the rule of Vira Singaraya Deva Maharaya records that one Mullunayakan of Nallada village disposed of half the village for 125 pagodas to one Banumasetty. ¹

Yet another copper plate discovered in Kapisthalam records that in S.1351 in the reign of the same viz. Virasinga Raya Deva Maharaya one Muttiyappa Nayakan sold half of the village for 113 pagodas to Arane Setty of another village. ²

No inscriptions have been however discovered so far regarding gift of land or money for rendering the service in the temple.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumazhisai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has also sung only one pasuram. He addressed the God here as Attrankarai Kidakkum Kannan “ஆற்றங்கரை கிடக்கும் கண்ணன்”

This in Tamil means that He is the God who is seen lying down on the bank of the river.

The Pasuram

Nanmugan Tiruvandadhi 50th Pasuram

கூற்றமும் சாரா கொடுவினையும் சாரா தீ
மாற்றமும் சாரா வகையறிந்தேன் - ஆற்றங்
கரைக் கிடக்கும் கண்ணன் கடல் கிடக்கும், மாயன்
உரைக் கிடக்கும் உள்ளத்து எனக்கு.

Meaning:

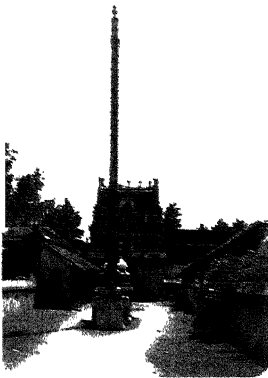
The very same Lord

Who is in Thiruparkadal;

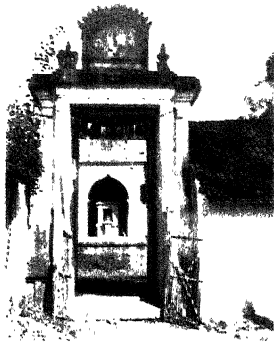
Who was worshipped by Brahma and other devas;

¹ . 996 B. Page 1360 A topographical list of Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.

² 996 C. Page 1360 A topographical list of inscriptions of the Madras Presidency by V.Rangacharya Vol.II, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi.

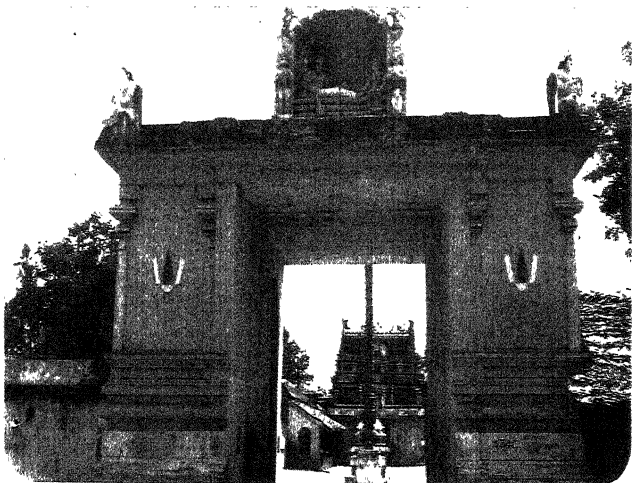


Thiru Kapisthalam
Gopuram View



Thiru Thalaichangadu
Gopuram View

Thiru Kapisthalam - Temple View





Thiru Kapisthalam - Sri Gajendra Varadhar Utsavamurthis

Thiru Thalaichangadu - Utsavamurthis



Is seen in a lying down posture at Kapisthalam on the banks of the Kaveri.

Once

This Lord

During the great Mahabharatha war

drove the chariot for Arjuna

and expounded the charama slokam;

Those words are still ringing in my ears and I am therefore neither afraid of death nor can any evil befall me.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108

Tirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

காணியும் இல்லமும் கைப்பொருளும் ஈன்றோரும்
பேணியி வாழ்க்கையும் பேருறவும் - சேனில்
புலித்தலத்தில் இன்பமும் பொங்கரவமேறிக்
கவித்தலத்தில் கண் சூயில்வோன் கால்

Meaning:

The divine feet of the Lord who is in yoga nidra
(divine slumber) lying down on Adishesha at Kapisthalam
Is all my possession,
Is my land,
my home,
my wealth,
my parents,
my passport for good life,
my kith and kin,
my sole source of happiness in this world as
well as in the other world (heaven).

* * *

THALAISANGU NAN MATHIYAM (THALAICHANGADU)

This place is a very small village. The temple is also in a very dilapidated condition. This place is about 13 kms. away from Sirkazhi on the Sirkazhi-Nagapattinam road. It can also be reached by getting down at Akkur railway station on the Mayavaram Tharagampadi railway route. After alighting at Akkur, one has to take a bus to this village.

Once upon a time, this place was a thick forest. 'Forest' in Tamil is known as 'kadu'. It is filled with Palasa trees. 'Sangu' means conch. Kaveripoompattinam is about seven kilometres from this place. In the olden days beautiful conches used to be sold at Kaveripoompattinam, a sea-side town. Perhaps, it is the combination of the availabilities of the chanku (i.e.) conches and the existence of a thick forest (i.e.) kaadu which contribute to the name of the town viz. Chanku kaaddu. Thalai only represents a prime position of importance. May be, due to efflux of time, the thalai chanku kaadu became through usage as Thalaichankadu. This place is mentioned even in Silapathikaram. Obviously therefore this is an old town.

The Perumal temple is almost in the midst of the village fields. The Moolavar is known as Nan Madiya Perumal. The Perumal is also known as Ven Sudar Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Utsavar is known as Vyoma Jyothi Piran as also Ven Sudar Piran. He is also known as Loganathan. Thayar is known as Sengamala Valli Thayar. The pushkarani is Chandra pushkarani and the Vimanam is Chandra Vimanam.

Moon God (i.e.) Chandra is known in Tamil as Mathi. Once upon a time, He was cursed and day by day he was waning. He was standing in a very sad mood, almost bent double with the weight of his worries. In Tamil, this posture is referred to as Naani. On that occasion Perumal is said to have appeared before Him and hence the Perumal is known as Nan Madiya Perumal. God is also believed to have appeared to Deva Brindangar. The Deity has a conch as its pillow. Some

therefore say that the place got its name as the Perumal here has underneath His head (in Tamil Thalai represents head) a chanku (i.e.) conch.

There is a garbagriha only for the Moolavar. There is no separate shrine for the Thayar. There is no Vimanam even for the Thayar. There is only a small mandapam in the front. The utsavar is kept outside garbagriha.

Epigraphical Highlights:

On stones built into the northern and southern walls of the Nanmadiyap Perumal temple record a gift of 100 kasus by the assembly of Thalaichchangadu for feeding in the name of Rajaraja ten brahmins in the temple and for Havirvali archana to the God.¹

On the western walls of the same temple, there is yet another record of the gift of the land to the temple of Adivaraha devar at Thalaichchangadu.²

Another inscription records a gift of lamp to the same temple by a lady.³

Another inscription on the northwest and south base of the Perumal temple at Thalaichchangadu records the remission of taxes on certain temple lands by the assembly in lieu of the annual interest of 150 kalanju on 400 kalanju of gold received by it from a merchant at Gangaikonda Cholapuram on behalf of the temple of Thiru Vayapadi Alvan.⁴

On the northern wall of the first prakara of the Sankaranyesvara temple in Thalaichchangadu, there is an interesting inscription which registers grant of four velis of land by the big assembly for house sites and for the maintenance of the Padikkapper (watchmen) who had to keep watch over

¹ 198 of ARIE 1925 App.B

² 199 of ARIE 1925 App.B

³ 200 and 201 of ARIE 1925 App.B

⁴ 203 of ARIE 1925 App.B

the entire village as they had no quarters before and as the allowances they had been receiving were not enough for their maintenance. This land was declared as alienable under any circumstances except in case of treason. ⁵

Yet another interesting inscription on the southern wall of the first prakara of the Sankaranyesvara temple in Thalaichchangadu registers the renewal of title deeds through the village assembly to all the residents who were in the enjoyment of lands in the several hamlets of the villages. The old registers and documents had been lost in the disturbed state of the country in the 5th, 11th and 15th years of the King Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva Chola. ⁶

Hymnology:

Thirumangai Alwar has sung two pasurams in praise of the Lord here. One of the two viz. the pasurm in Peria Tirumozhi 8-9-9 is given below with its meaning:

Poem:

கண்ணூர் கண்ணபுரம் கடிகை கடிகமழும்
தண்ணூர் தாமரைகூழ் தலைச்சங்க மேல்திசையுள்
விண்ணோர் நான்மதியை விரிகின்ற வெஞ்சுடரை
கண்ணூர்க் கண்டுக்கொண்டு களிக்கின்றது இங்கு
என்று கொலோ?

Meaning:

Oh when in this world
Will I, to my hearts content be able to see
That Perumal (Lord)
Who resides
In beautiful Thirukannapuram -
In Ghatikachalam (Sholinghur) -
In the western part of Thalaisangam full of sweet smelling
cool lotus flowers?

⁵ 207 of ARIE 1925 App.B

⁶ 213 of ARIE 1925 App.B

He is like the Moon which gives happiness to Devas and
He is bright and glowing like the early morning Sun.

Divya Kavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar 108
Tirupathy Andadi:

Poem:

செப்பும் கால் ஆதவனும் திங்களும் வானும் தரையும்
அப்பும் காலும் கனலுமாய் நின்றான் - கைப்பால்
அலைச்சங்கமேந்தும், அமியரங்கத்தம்மான்
தலைச்சங்க நாண் மதியத்தான்.

Meaning:

The Perumal of Thalaisanga nan madiyam
Is holding the conch (Panchajanyam) which emerged out of
the ocean, in His hand and
He is Ranganatha himself
He is omnipresent and omniscient;
He is the Panchabhootams i.e. (sky, earth, air,
fire and)
He is the Sun as also the moon
He is everywhere.

* * *

THIRU ANBIL

This place is also known as Premapuri. It is one of the divya desams in Chola Nadu. This place is regarded as a divya desam both by the Vaishnavites and Saivites even as in the case of the Kanchipuram divya desam in Thondai Nadu. The western part of Anbil is known as Vishnu sthalam. It is known locally as Mel Anbil. Within a short distance to the east lies the Sivasthalam which is known as Kil Anbil. It lies on the Tiruchy-Kumbakonam bus route. It is about 20 kms. from Tiruchy. It can also be reached by train by alighting at Lalgudi railway station as it is five miles from there.

The moolavar here is known as Azhagiya Nambi. He is seen in a bhujanga sayanam pose facing east. The utsavar is known as Sundararajan. The Thayar is known as Azhagia Valli Nachiyar. The theerthams are Manduka pushkarini and Kollidam. The vimanam is Taraka vimanam. Perumal appeared here in response to the prayers of Brahma and Valmiki. Anbil was in existence even before the Pandavas. As Thirumazhisai Alvar has sung in praise of this divya desam, actually this place must have been in existence at least 6100 years ago. Thirugnanasambandar also sang in praise of this place. There is an interesting story connected with the songs sung by the Saivite saint Thirugnanasambandar. It is believed that once upon a time, there was a flood in the river Kaveri. As the Sivasthalam is lying on the northern bank of Kaveri river, the Saivite saint could not cross the river to go to the temple. He therefore stood on the other side of the river and sang songs in praise of the Lord. On this side of the Kaveri bank, Lord Ganesa was standing. He is said to have strained His ears, tilted His head to one side in order to listen to the song of the Saivite saint. Even today, the idol of Vinayaka in this place is popularly known as "Sevi saitha Vinayakar" i.e. the Lord Ganesa who lent His ears to listen carefully to the holy song.

Premapuri is also known as Thirumukkudal i.e. Triveni. It is known as Triveni as the three rivers Kaveri, Savithri and Phalguni rivers are said to have merged into one and flowing near this town. Savithri and Phalguni rivers are said to be

flowing underground. This confluence of the three rivers has made people refer to this place as Dakshina Gaya. People who cannot go to Gaya can perform the sraddha for their forefathers here with an equal holy effect.

Yet another interesting feature of this place is that the theertham viz. Manduka pushkarini is common for both the Perumal temple and Siva temple. Mandukam in sanskrit refers to a frog. It is said that once upon a time, a muni was cursed and he became a frog. He wanted to regain his human form. He therefore had his bath everyday in the tank. For 48 days he observed a vratha and prayed to the Perumal regularly. God appeared before him and redeemed him from the curse. The pushkarini has therefore been named after the rishi who became a Mandukam.

Once upon a time, this place was very prosperous and rich. As proof of this, there is a story connected with the life history of Kavi Chakravarthi Kambar. Once he came to Anbil. A dasi courtesan by name Silambi had a desire that the famous poet Kambar should compose a few lines in her praise. She met him and requested him to compose a few lines in her honour. Kambar asked her to give 1000 pons to him. She had only 500 pons with her. She requested Kambar to compose atleast half of a song in her praise! Kambar obliged. The following two lines were composed by Kambar:

தண்ணீரும் காவேரி தார்வேந்தனுஞ் சோழன்
மண்ணுவதுஞ் சோழ மண்டலமே - பெண்ணுவான்

Freely translated this poem composed by Kambar is as follows:

When we refer to a river, we should think of only Kaveri;
When we refer to a king, we should think only of the Chola kings;
When we refer to a kingdom, we should think only of the Chola kingdom;

Similarly, when we refer to a damsel, none can equal Anbil Silambi.

After giving her this incomplete song, Kambar left the place. A number of days went by. One day, Avvaiyar came to Anbil. She was very hungry. The same dasi who had given up all her wealth to Kambar in spite of her poverty offered a plateful of gruel to appease the hunger of Avvaiyar. Avvaiyar felt very touched by this gesture. She saw that only half of a song was written on the walls of the house of this dasi. After partaking of the gruel provided by the dasi, out of a sense of gratitude, Avvaiyar composed the balance of the lines and completed the song as follows:

அன்பிற் சிலம்பி யரவிந்தத் தாளடியாள்
செம்பொற் - சிலம்பே சிலம்பு.

As Avvaiyar completed half of the song in return for the gruel, she was also known as the Avvaiyar who sang for 'Kuzhu' which in Tamil means "gruel".

The lines composed by Avvaiyar freely translated run as follows:

When we refer to an anklet (in Tamil anklet is known as *silambu*), it refers only to the golden *silambu* (anklet) worn by Silambi on Her lotus like feet.

The Sivalingam in the Sivakshetra in Anbil also has a unique feature. The Sivalingam is said to be made of Rudrakshas. In those Rudrakshas, there are a number of small holes which cannot be seen by the naked eye. As proof of this the priest will show to whoever visits this temple that thin sticks will go through these holes in the Lingam with great ease. A similar phenomenon can be seen at Suchindram in Kanyakumari where the sculptor has sculpted the images with such finesse, that a thin stick which is inserted in one ear can come out through the other ear! The girdle worn around the waist by the sculpted figures are also made with such finesse that a thin stick can go through each of the tiny bells in the girdle! In this Sivakshetram, as in Kasi, there are shrines for Visveswarar, Bindhu Madhavan, Bairavan etc., and as in Gaya there is a tree which is fresh all the time and never rots with age.

Epigraphical Highlights:

There are a number of inscriptions in this temple which throw light on the political and religious history of those days.

An inscription on the southern wall of the Visvaksena shrine in Sundararaja Perumal temple refers to the 44th year of the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Kulottunga Chola Deva I who abolished tolls. ¹

There are a number of inscriptions which refer to gift of land and gold to the temple. To illustrate, an inscription on the western wall of the central shrine in the Sundararaja Perumal temple records a gift of land during the time of the Chola King Rajakesarivarman. ²

Another inscription records yet another gift of land. ³

Yet another inscription relates to the period of the Vijayanagara King Devaraya Maharaya Virupaksharaya Praudhadeva Maharaja and records a gift of land to the temple by Saluva Sangamadeva Maharaja. ⁴

Yet another inscription relates to the 4th year of the reign of the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajendra Choladeva III which records a gift of land. ⁵

Another inscription records that in the 8th year of the Hoysala King Vira Ramanathadeva, land was gifted to the temple. ⁶

Another inscription on the northern wall of the central shrine in the Sundararaja Perumal temple records the setting up of the images of Lakshmana, Lakshmi and Hanuman by a devout Brahmin. ⁷

¹ Inscription No. 592 of ARIE 1902

² Inscription No. 589 of ARIE 1902

³ Inscription No. 590 of ARIE 1902

⁴ Inscription No. 593 & 594 of ARIE 1902

⁵ Inscription No. 596 of ARIE 1902

⁶ Inscription No. 597 of ARIE 1902

⁷ Inscription No. 591 of ARIE 1902

Yet another inscription on a pillar lying in front of the Vigneswara temple in the village records that in the 34th year of the reign of the Chola King Madurai Konda Parakesari Varman and in the 6th year of the Chola King Rajaraja Kesarivarman, gold was donated in order to enable lighting of lamps in the temple. ⁸

On the northern wall of the central shrine in the Sundararaja Perumal temple, there is an inscription which registers gift of land by Saluva Sangama Devamaharaja to the Vadi Azhagiya Perumal of Anbil. ⁹

In the same northern wall there is also a record of a gift of land for meeting the expenses towards offering worship to the God on Poosam and Thirukarthigai days. ¹⁰

On the pillar in the maha mandap of the same temple there is an inscription which registers gift of gold and ceiling slabs by Ramanujadasar for the mandapa. ¹¹

Yet another inscription which is seen on the gopuram of the temple (left side) also registers a gift of land to the temple. ¹²

Hymnology:

Tirumalisai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the Lord here. He has also sung only one pasuram. The same is extracted below:

Nanmugan Tiruvandadhi 36th Pasuram:

Poem:

நாகத் தணைக் குடந்தை வெஃகா திருவெவ்வுள்
நாகத் தனையரங்கம் பேரன்பில் - நாகத்
தனைப்பாற் கடல் கிடக்கும் ஆதி நெடுமால்
அனைப்பார் கருத்தானாவான்.

⁸ Inscription No. 599 & 600 of ARIE 1902

⁹ Inscription No. 149 of ARIE 1937-38 Appendix B

¹⁰ Inscription No. 150 of ARIE 1937-38 Appendix B

¹¹ Inscription No. 151 of ARIE 1937-38 Appendix B

¹² Inscription No. 153 of ARIE 1937-38 Appendix B

Meaning:

Oh Lord You are seen lying down as Adishesha i.e. Sayana form Among many other places

At Thirukudanthai (Kumbakonam), At Thiruvehka (near Kanchipuram),

At Thiruvallor, At Sri Rangam, At Thirupaernagar,

At Anbil and At Thiruparkadal. Oh Lord Narayana

You reside in the hearts of all your sincere devotees;

I have no doubt that the only reason for your manifesting yourself in so many places is to give an opportunity to the millions of devotees living in all those places to welcome you into their hearts.

Alwar is trying to convey the message that God prefers to live in the hearts of His devotees.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar

108 Tirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

போற்றி செய ஓர் வெண்குடைக்கீழ்ப் பொன்னாடு மிந்
நாடும்
நால்திசையும் ஆண்டாலும் நன்கு இல்லை - தோற்றம்
இலா
எந்தை அன்பில் ஆதி இணைத் தாமரை அடிக்கே
சிந்தை அன்பிலாதார் சிலர்.

Meaning:

Those

Who do not have implicit faith

In the adorable divine lotus feet of the Lord

Who resides at Anbil, and

Who is my father and

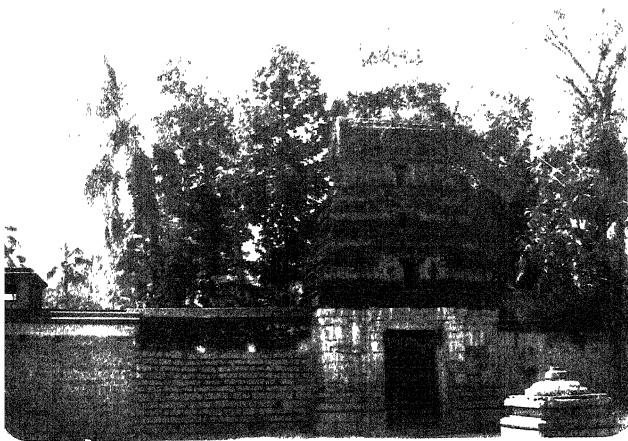
Who is the creator himself and so is beyond the normal phenomenon of birth -

Even if they rule this world and the skies in such an exemplary manner as to be praised by many

Yet will derive no real, everlasting, meaningful fame and name.

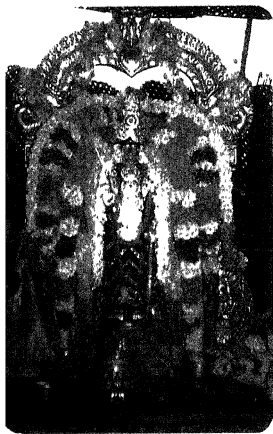
Pillai Perumal Iyengar says that there is nothing which can equal much less surpass faith in God.

* * *

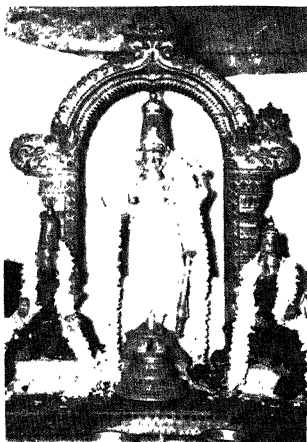


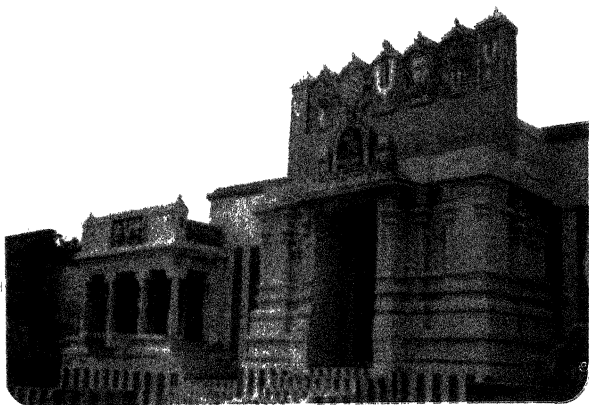
Thiru Anbil - Temple View

Thiru Anbil - Utsavamurthi



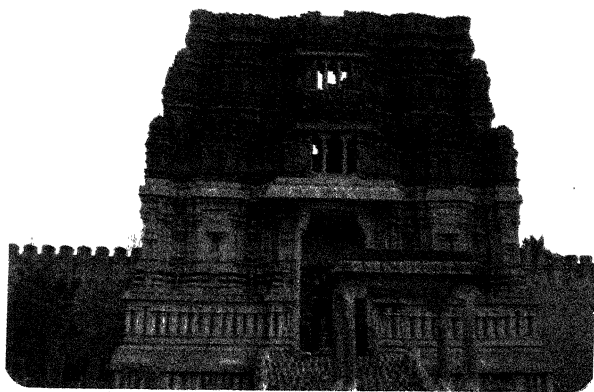
Thiru Anbil - Utsavamurthis





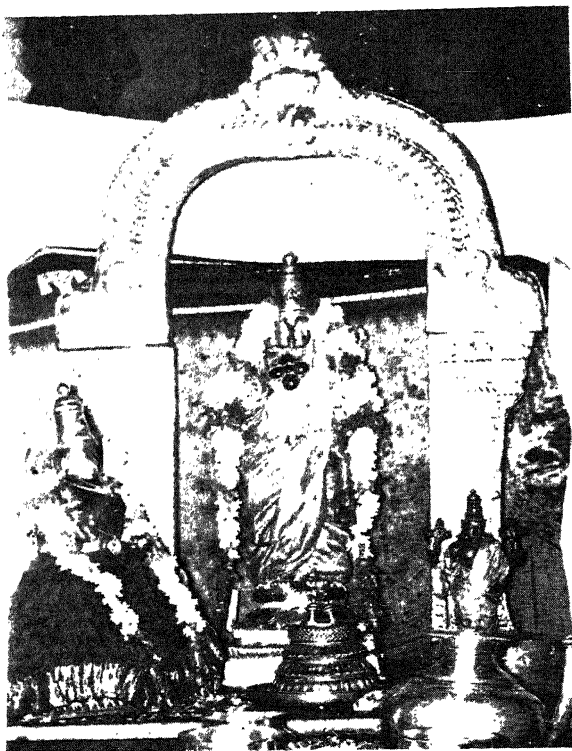
Thiru Vellarai - Temple View

Thiru Vellarai - Temple Tower





Thiru Vellarai - Temple Gopuram



Thiru Vellarai - Utsava Murthis

THIRU VELLARAI

This place is also known as Svethagiri kshetram. It is located about 12 miles from Tiruchy on the way to Thuraiyur. It can also be approached from Srirangam on the way to Uthamar koil. The moolavar is known as Pundarikakshan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Thayar is known as Shengabavalli, Pankaja Selvi. She has a separate shrine. The utsava Thayar is known as Pankaja Valli. The vimanam is Vimalakruti vimanam. There are seven theerthams here. God appeared before Garuda, Sibi Chakravarthi, Bhoo devi, Markandeya rishi, Brahma, Rudra and Indra.

Near the 12th mile on the Tiruchnipoly Thuraiyur Road, stands an unfinished gopuram of low height. This is Thiruvellarai also known as Sveta giri. Literally translated Sveta giri means the holy white hill. The gopuram is not very impressive. But this has an interesting legend connected with it. It is believed that the temple was built by Sibi Chakravarthi who belonged to the Surya kulam, Ikshavaku dynasty. Sri Rama belongs to this dynasty. The lineage is as follows: The grand son of Sibi Chakravarthi is Sagar, his grand son is Bagirathan, his grand son is Dileepan, his son is Raghu, his son is Ajan and his son is Dasarathan and one of his four sons is Rama. Thus, this temple was built by one of the illustrious forefathers of Sri Rama himself.

The Brahmanda puranam, kshetra katham details the sthala purana relating to this divya desam. In Treta yugam, Sibi Chakravarthi was ruling at Ayodhya. He had heard of the atrocities of Ravana the king of Lanka. He decided to punish this demon by waging a war with him. He assembled his army and proceeded towards Lanka. He reached Neelikavanam near Svetha giri. He decided to rest there for a while along with his army. As he was resting and enjoying the cool breeze and the scenic beauty of the area, an unusual event provoked his curiosity. He sighted a white boar which was rushing about hither and thither. Because of its unusual colour as against the usual black colour of the pigs, the king followed it even as it was running about. He wanted to catch it. Suddenly it disappeared

into a bush. The king immediately cleared the bush. Lo and behold he discovered Markandeya Maharishi and Bhoomidevi doing their penance at that place. He then heard a voice from heaven (asareeri) which said:

"O Sibi Raja! I will be born in course of time as a son of Dasaratha. I will destroy Ravana at that time". Sibi Chakravarthi was a bit taken aback as he wondered from where the voice was coming and if he were to obey the voice his having brought the armed forces from distant Ayodhya would become an infructuous, futile, exercise. He therefore loudly expressed his doubts and wondered about his future course of action after having spent so much of money and having brought his entire army across the continent. Again, the asareeri voice spoke and directed him to build a temple at Svetha giri to Perumal. The voice said that Perumal would be appearing at Thiruvellarai in order to fulfil a promise that he had given to Thayar. It is said that once Thayar expressed a desire to have the pelasure of ruling the world created by the Lord. Perumal assured her that she would be given an opportunity to do "sengol paripalanam" at Thiruvellarai when Perumal would be descending to the earth in response to the penance of Markandeya maharishi and Bhoomidevi. The voice therefore asked Sibi Chakravarthi to prepare the ground as it were.

There is yet another version of the Sthala puranam. As per that version when Sibi Chakravarthi saw the white boar disappear, he went to the place where Markandeya rishi was living. He asked him to explain the curious phenomenon of the white boar's disappearance. Markandeya rishi with his gnana drushti said that the white boar was none other than Perumal Himself in his Varaha avataram and that the King was very lucky to have had a vision of the Lord and he requested Sibi Chakravarthi to continue to live there, build a temple for Perumal. The rishi also said that Lord would soon take the Rama avataram and that the King of Lanka would meet his end at the hands of Perumal himself.

Accordingly Sibi Chakravarthi built the temple on the hillock viz. Svetha giri and installed the Perumal in the archa

form there. The Perumal was known as Svetha girinathan, Pundarikakshan. Perhaps with poetic liberty the story is said that when the boar ran it left the imprint of its feet and a holy tank was built at the place. Thus, we have seven theerthams inside the temple itself. They are Padma theertham, Varaha theertham, Manikarnika theertham, Kusahasti theertham and Kanda pushkarini theertham. In addition the bush where Bhoomidevi was doing her penance, was converted by Sibi raja into a poonkidangu (flower garden). Today this place is known as Poonkinaru. Even today about 13 miles to the south east of Svetha giri, there is a village known as Pankaja selvi. It is on the Samayapuram Tiruchy road to the south of Samayapuram. There are lands registered in the name of the Goddess in the village records. The residents of this village are even today honoured during Panguni Thirunal (Panguni festival).

When the temple was built at Svethagiri by Sibi Chakravarthi, Markandeya rishi had to arrange to have all the religious functions and rites performed. He therefore ordered that 3700 Sri Vaishnava brahmins from Antarvedi village which lies in between the two rivers Ganga and Yamuna, may be brought to Thiruvellarai to attend to these functions. Accordingly, the 3700 families were brought. It is said that once one amongst these 3700 died and to replace him God himself appeared and completed the function. The Sri Vaishnavas in this place even today have their bath in the Kusahasti theertham while celebrating the Avani Avittam (holy thread changing ceremony), then proceed to the temple accompanied by Nadaswaram and the homam is performed in the temple precincts itself. It is said that this is so because the gap left by one amongst the 3700, who passed away was replaced, by God himself and so the Avani Avittam was celebrated in the temple where God took the place of the one missing person and performed Avani Avittam along with the others. There is a manyam separately gifted (endowments) to meet the expenditure for distributing sundal prasada after Avani Avittam. In course of time, these 3700 brahmins got dispersed to Sriviliputtur, Thirukoshtiyur, Vembathur, Kidaram, Perunkarunai (the last 3 in Ramnad District). Even today, in those places, they are identified as Thiruvellarai Sri Vaishnavas. Ramanuja when he needed some priests at Melkote for rendering service

to Thirunarayana, is reported to have taken 52 families from Thiruvellarai. Another 64 families went to Kongu Nadu (Erode of today). In Alwar Thirunagari in Tirunelveli District, some of the Sri Vaishnavas are known as Thiruvellaraiyaar. It therefore appears that the original 3700 Sri Vaishnava families entrusted with the job of running the temple by Markandeya maharishi are today dispersed over a vast tract.

As God had promised that he would allow the Thayar to have sengol paripalanam at this place, even today whenever the deity is taken out in procession during the festival, the vighraha of the Goddess will go first and Perumal will follow! Similarly, before Perumal reaches the moolasthanam, the Goddess will be made to reach the place first.

A particular entrance in this temple is known as Nazhi ket^a vasal (நாழிகேட்ட வாசல்). It is said that one day there was delay in Perumal returning after his rounds in the village. Goddess therefore asked him as to why He was delayed and at this particular entrance, God is reported to have told her the reason and only then entered the precincts of the temple.

The moolavar who is on the top of the hill, has to be approached by climbing 59 steps. These steps also have a significance of their own. The first 18 steps are said to represent the 18 chapters in the Gita. The next 4 steps represent the four vedas. After crossing these, one reaches the Bali peetam. The bali peetam here is considered as very holy and powerful. Thirumanjanam is done to the bali peetam. The devotees when their prayers are answered, promise to do thirumanjanam to bali peetam and offer pongal both to Perumal and the bali peetam as their thanksgiving offering in return for the prayers answered. After offering prayers at bali peetam, 5 steps have to be climbed. These five steps said to represent pancha bhoothams. After crossing them, one crosses the Nazhi ket^a vasal i.e. the entrance where Goddess asked why the perumal was 'late'. Then one goes around the hill in a pradakshina form. While doing this pradakshinam there are two entrances to approach the temple. These are known as Utharayana and Dakshinayana entrances. From the 1st day of Adi to the end of Markazhi i.e. (July to

December) the Dakshinayana vasal is kept open and from the beginning of Thai to the end of Ani i.e. (January to June) the Uttarayana vasal is kept open. The path taken by the Sun God has got a great significance for determining the path that has to be followed to approach the Perumal. As during Dakshinayanam and Utharayanam the path of the Sun God changes, accordingly the entrance to the temple is also changed between these two seasons. After crossing this vasal, there are eight steps which are said to represent the Ashtakshara mantram. Then comes 24 steps which have to be climbed. These represent the 24 aksharas in Gayathri mantram. Hence they are known as Gayathri steps. In Srirangam, the Gayathri mandapam is famous. Here it is the Gayathri steps which are unique. After crossing the Gayathri steps, we reach the moolasthanam. To the right of the Perumal is the Sun God, to the left is Moon God. Both these Gods are seen as if they are fanning the Perumal (). To the right Garuda and again to the left Adishesan are seen in human forms. To the right side, Markandeya and left side Bhoomippiratti are seen in a seated posture as if they are doing tapas. The Disc (chakra) in the hands of the moolavar is seen in the prayoga form. The moolavar is in a standing posture. In front of the moolavar Pankaja Nayaki and Pundarikashan utsava idols are also seen.

As one comes down after the dharshan before one crosses the Nazhi ketta vasal, there is a Chithirai mandapam. Here one sees Surya, Chandra, Indra, Garuda, Iravatham, Brahma, Siva along with Pundarikakshan. These are beautifully sculpted sculptures. Perhaps these were the sculptures which Perialwar saw when he sang his pasuram starting with the words Indiranodu (இந்திரனோடு) i.e. along with Indra.

In the street where the ratha (chariot) is drawn there is a tank which is funnily known as the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law tank. This is also known as Marupati kinaru (மாறுபட்டி கிணறு) as also the Chakra theertham. This is built in the swastik shape. The civil construction is so good that one who has a bath on one side and another person bathing on the other wing, cannot see each other. In this street, the sannidhi of Udayavar is there.

Due to problems at Srirangam, Udayavar stayed in Thiruvellarai for 12 years. During that time, one day the Goddess asked Perumal as to what he proposed to do to the sanyasi who was staying in that place for so long. God replied that the Goddess could send to him as prasada, food after she has partaken of it. Since that day even today, the food after it is offered to the deity is taken as prasada to the Udayavar sannidhi with melam and thalam and offered as neivedhyam to Udayavar. The tank in which the Udayavar had his daily bath is known as Udayavar kulam. In addition, there is also another tank known as Paalootru kulam. God is said to have used the water from this tank for applying the vaishnavite caste mark. The water in this tank is very clean and clear. It has the taste of tender coconut water.

There is also a belief that whoever has a bath in any one of the five holy tanks viz. Padma theertham, Varaha theertham, Mani karnika theertham, Kusahasti theertham, Kandha pushkarini theertham and then offers worship to the Perumal here on Sunday in the month of Karthigai will definitely be blessed with progeny.

It is also believed that Lord Yama, the Ruler of Hell himself said that whoever goes to Vellarai and worships the Lord atop the hill would not be sent to Hell. Desikar in his Hamsa sandesam has referred to five divya desams viz. Tirupati-Thirumalai, Kanchipuram, Thiruvellarai, Srirangam and Thirumaliruncholai hill and has sung the praise of those places and extolled the glory of these five divya desams through his envoy viz. the swan. Desikan is believed to be the tirumani amsam of Thiru Venkatachalapathi. He first praises the glory of Tirumalai, then he praises the place where he was born viz. Kanchipuram, third he praises the glory of the birth place of his Paramacharya viz. Engal Alvan viz. Thiruvellarai. Only after that he praises Srirangam which is regarded as Bhooloka vaikuntam by many and lastly he praises Thirumaliruncholai.

Perialwar refers to the God here as gnana sudar i.e. flame of knowledge, Desikar refers to the God as Swayam prakasa i.e. a person who is self-effulgent and is bright and shining. He also refers to him as one who dispels ignorance to those who

approach him (தம்மை நாடியவர்களின் ஆறியாமையைப் போக்குபவர்). What is more among all the worldly good things gold is considered as the most precious. Thirumangai Alwar refers to this God as வெள்ளறையுள் கல்லறை மேல் பொன்னனை i.e. the most precious golden one who is safe on the hill top at Thiruvellarai.

Thiru Vellarai is also famous for two acharyas. They are Veeyakkondan and Engalalavan. Amongst the sisyas of Nathamuni, there were two from Thiruvellarai. They were Pundarikakshan and Kurugai Kavalappar. Sriman Nathamuni had two pathways for attaining moksha. One was known as bakthi yoga; the person who masters this yoga would be able to attain moksha for only himself. The other path is through mastering Nalayira divya prabandham. Through the repetition of this Nalayira divya prabandham, the entire world could be blessed and redeemed. Kurukai Kavalappar took to the bakthi marga. He enjoyed God and ensured moksham only for himself. But Pundarikakshan learnt the divya prabandham and was able to help the people in the entire world. Hence it is that Pundarikakshan was named even by Nathamuni as Uyyakkondan. His was thus a selfless life of service for others viz. a true benefactor.

The other acharya of Thiruvellarai is Engalalvan. He was born in one of the Sri Vaishnava brahmin families of Thiruvellarai. He was known as Vishnu chittar. Once upon a time, Kurattalvar lost his eye sight due to the atrocity committed by one Kirumi Kanta Cholan. At that time, when he had lost his eye sight, Yathiraja had come to Srirangam. As he could not have the assistance of Kurattalwan for completing the Sri Bashyam, he is said to have taken the help of Vishnu Chittar for doing the rest of the work. At that time, he proved to be so intelligently useful that Udayavar called him lovingly as Engal Alwano (எங்கள் ஆழ்வானோ). Since that time, Vishnu Chittar came to be known as Engal Alwan.

There is also another interesting story relating to this divya desam. Once upon a time Nedadurammal asked his father Nedadur Alwan to teach him Sri Bashya Kalakshepam. He

asked him to go and learn it from Engal Alwan at Thiruvellarai. He was sent all the way from Kanchipuram to Thiruvellarai. When he reached Thiruvellari, he went and knocked at the door of Engal Alwan. At that time from inside the house Engal Alwan asked as to who it was who was knocking at the door. Nadadurammal is said to have replied it is only 'I'. Engal Alwan then asked him to get back and come after the feeling of 'I' and the ego connected with it is removed. Engal Alwan is reported to have said "நான் செத்து நீ வா" Literally translated this means let the concept of 'I' die and then you return. He therefore had to return to Kanchi. When he returned he related this to his father Nadadur Alwan. He told him that he should give up this sense of ego and 'I' and refer to himself as Adiyen i.e. your obedient servant. He came back to Thiruvellarai having shed his ego and then Engal Alwan thought him the Sri Bashya Kalakshepam. As Engal Alwan became the acharya for Nedadur Ammal he came to be also known as Ammal Acharyan. Even today his descendents are known as Ammal acharyars.

The aroma of the breeze that wafts at Thiruvvellarai is also said to have medicinal properties and rejuvenates the tired souls. Perhaps it is this which made the Alwar refer to this Perumal by saying 'தென்றல் மாமணம் குமழ் தரவடு திரு-
வெள்ளைநா நின்றேனே' "Thenral Mamanam kamal taravadu Thiruvellarai Ninrane". This means that in Thiruvellarai where the sweet smelling breeze wafts the Perumal is seen standing. Yet another interesting feature in the temple at Thiruvellarai is the phenomenon of successive reflection of sound. In this temple which is constructed at the top of the hillock, there is a slab on the southern side of the temple. The majestic walls are more than 40 feet high. The sound uttered from the hill is first reflected back from the straight wall on the opposite side. The same sound also hits the wall on the right side. Then the sound after hitting the opposite wall is reflected and from there again it hits the wall on the left side and this sound is finally heard by the person who utters it. Thus one is able to listen to three reflections of the same sound. Usually in temple corridors and in front of the huge rock surface one reflects only a single echo. But here we hear three successive reflections which is a unique phenomenon. The echo does not get weakened with

reflection. The original tone and tenor is maintained in all the three reflected sounds. This is a rather unusual phenomenon. It should be experienced by every one who visits this temple.

Epigraphical Highlights:

In the rock cave in the Pundarikasha Perumal temple to the left of the entrance, there is a much damaged record of the Chola King Rajaraja I. On one of the pillars in the same cave also, there is a much damaged record relating to the 2nd year of the Chola king Rajakesarivarman. ¹

Yet another inscription on the pillar in the rock cave in the temple, there is yet another damaged record of the Chola king Rajaraja Rajakesarivarman I. It seems to register allotments for meeting the daily requirements of the temple. ²

On the second pillar in the same cave, there is a record relating to the 8th year of the Chola king Parakasavarman. It registers a gift made by the queen of Udaiyar Anaimerrunjinai to the God Sri Krishna and His consort Rukmini of the temple at Thiru Vellarai. This is incidentally the earliest topographical mention of the shrine to Sri Krishna and Rukmini in this temple. ³

Yet another damaged record relating to the 15th year of the Chola king Parakesarivarman on the same pillar in the rock cave in the Perumal temple records the existence of the big temple at Thiruvellarai. ⁴

Another damaged record relating to the 5th year of the Chola king Parakesarivarman is to be found on the third pillar in the same cave. This refers to the Chola king as one who took the head of the Pandya. ⁵

¹ 531 and 532 of ARIE 1905

² 533 of ARIE 1905

³ 534 of ARIE 1905

⁴ 535 of ARIE 1905

⁵ 536 of ARIE 1905

Another inscription on the same pillar relates to the 10th year of the Pallava king Nandivarman. It describes Nandivarman as the forehead ornament of the Pallava family. ⁶

Yet another damaged record relating to the 13th year of the Chola king Rajakesarivarman (Rajaraja I) refers to the king as one who destroyed the ships at Kandamur. It also records gift of gold to the temple. ⁷

Another inscription on the same pillar in the cave is also damaged. But it mentions the setting up of an image of Rukmini, the consort of Krishna in the big temple at Thiruvellarai and it registers a provision made for offerings to the Goddess. ⁸

There is a stone inscription which says that a Nandivarma Pallavan donated five measures of rice and gold in order to meet the expenditure towards performing the pooja in this temple.

On the western verandah in the first prakara of the Pundarikaksha Perumal temple, there is an inscription in Tamil which registers a royal gift of tax free land for providing offerings and worship to Sendamaraikkanna Alwar and Kaambikkadaivar at Thiruvellarai. ⁹

On the same wall also is registered a gift of a house site to provide for certain offerings. ¹⁰

On the inner wall of the Nali-kettan vasal (left of entrance in the same temple) there is a verse in praise of the Pandya king who divided the Kaviri nadu i.e Chola country between Valava and Magadar-kon. ¹¹

On the inner wall of the Nali-kettan vasal on the right hand side of the entrance, there is a verse in praise of Maran

⁶ 537 of ARIE 1905

⁷ 538 of ARIE 1905

⁸ 540 of ARIE 1905.

⁹ Ins.194 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁰ Ins.195 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹¹ Ins.196 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

who claims to have uprooted in Kaviri-nadu all the pillars in the palace of the Chola (Sembiyan) excepting sixteen belonging to the mandapa where the work Pattinappalai of Kannan was just presented to scholars for their approval. ¹²

On the eastern wall of the same vasal relating to the Pandya king Maravarman Tribhuvanachakravartin Kulasekharadeva is registered a gift of money for burning a perpetual lamp in front of the Goddess. ¹³

On the same wall referring to the same Pandyan king is registered gift of the village Pannangudi by Vyasa Bharati, the disciple of Ramachandra-Sarasvati for providing offerings to the Goddess. ¹⁴

On the eastern and western wall of the dhvajastambha mandapam relating to the period of the Pandyan Kings Jatavarman and Konerinmaikondan is registered gift of land and gift of money for providing offerings and worship to the God. ¹⁵

Another inscription relating to the period of the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajarajadeva registers the formation by the Mulaparishat of Tiruvellarai of a committee of eight persons to be elected annually to supervise the leasing of lands belonging to Perumal Ulagudaiya Nayanar (king). ¹⁶

On the northern wall of the second prakara of the same temple relating to the same Chola King as referred to in the earlier inscription, is registered a gift of money by a brahmin lady to Narasingamangalam for feeding the temple servants on four specified days during the festival. ¹⁷

An inscription on the same northern wall of the second prakara of the temple relates to King Sadasivadeva-Maharaya

¹² Ins.197 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹³ Ins.198 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁴ Ins.199 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁵ Ins.200 & 201 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁶ Ins.204 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁷ Ins.205 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

of the Vinajayagara dynasty which registers a gift of land for the maintenance of the feeding house Sribhaskyakara-Ramanujakuta in the village. ¹⁸

On the northern wall of the second prakara of the same temple in the same place relating to the King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Tribhuvanaviradeva of the Chola dynasty is registered an endowment in money for feeding 900 persons in Karpagavilli-matha during the festival in the Vaigasi month at Tiruvellarai and registers a similar endowment by the same person for feeding 90 persons daily for 30 festival days during the year in the temple at Tiruvellarai respectively. ¹⁹

An inscription on the northern wall of the second prakara of the temple relating to the period of the Chola King Tribhuvanachakravartin Rajarajadeva registers a gift of money by Arindavan Villupparaiyan of Sattangudi for rearing a flower garden and for feeding Sri Vaishnavas in the temple. ²⁰

An inscription on the same northern wall of the second prakara of the temple relates to the period of the Pandyan King Jatavarman Tribhuvanachakravartin Sundara-Pandyadeva registers a gift of money by persons for feeding the servants of the temple on three days of the festival in the month of Chittirai and for supply of drinking water to the devotees who were fed in the Periya-matha at Tiruvellarai. ²¹

HYMNOLOGY:

Two Alvars have sung in praise of the Lord here viz. Perialwar and Tirumangai Alwar. The former has sung 11 pasurams and the latter 13 pasurams. The pasuram of Perialwar in Perialwar

¹⁸ Ins.206 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

¹⁹ Ins.207 & 208 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B

²⁰ Ins.210 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B.

²¹ Ins.211 & 212 ARIE 1938-39 Appendix B.

Tirumozhi (2-8-1) and its meaning is given below:

Pasuram:

இந்திரனோடு பிரமன் ஈசன் இமையவரெல்லாம்
மந்திர மாமலர் கொண்டு மறைந்து உவராய் வந்து
நின்றார்
சந்திரன் மாளிகை சேரும் சதுரர்கள் வெள்ளறை நின்றாய்
அந்தியம் போது இதுவாகும் அழகனே காப்பிட வாராய்.

Meaning:

Oh Lord -

Lord Indra, Lord Brahma, Lord Siva and other Gods have brought flowers to offer at your feet and worship you -

You are seen in a standing posture at Thiruvellarai which is full of tall, stately, beautiful mansions which almost touch chandramandalam i.e kingdom of Moon God. If he so choses Moon God can during his travels in the sky, rest for a while in those mansions;

O Lord, Thiruvellarai is full of intelligent people well versed in scriptures;

O Lord of Thiruvellarai,

It is now dusk, a time when evil spirits will be roaming about.

Oh! Beautiful one do not venture out at this time. Come here. Let me light camphor and take other precautionary measures to protect you from people who may cast an evil eye on you.

Here the Alwar thinks he is the mother of Perumal viz. Yasodha and the Perumal at Thiruvellarai is her son Kannan to whom she is issuing motherly affectionate instructions as to keep indoors during dusk when the evil forces will be roaming about!.

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Tirupathi Andadi:

Poem:

கல்லிருந்தான் தந்தை கமலத்தோன், அக்கமலத்து
இல்லிருந்தான் தந்தை அரங்கேசன் என்றே-தொல்லை
மறை

யுள்ளரையா நின்றமையால் உள்ளமே கள்ளமின்றி
வெள்ளறையான் தாளே விரும்பு.

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine.

Lord Brahma who emerged out of a lotus, is the father of Lord Siva who resides in Kailash mountain. The ancient vedas also say that the father of Lord Brahma is Arangesan. So without any fear please desire to attain only the divine feet of the Perumal at Thiruvellarai.

* * *

THIRUKKARAMBANUR (UTTAMAR KOIL)

This divya desam is about four miles from Tiruchy. It can also be reached by train as it lies on the Trichinopoly-Villupuram chord line. Close to this temple is the Kollidam river, Ayyan vaikkal and Kadamba Thirukkulam. A unique feature of this divya desam is that in this one temple, there are three sannidhis for each of the Holy Trinity viz. Siva, Brahma and Narayana. The respective consorts also have a shrine. One more special feature is a separate shrine for the Goddess of Learning viz. Sarasvati. Yet another interesting feature is that for Karthigai deepam, Lord Siva and Perumal are taken together in procession round the streets of the temple town. The other peculiar feature is that the temple has got two separate prakaras inside.

The moolavar Perumal here is known as Purushothaman. He is seen in a bhujanga sayanam posture facing east. Thayar is known as Poorva Devi as also Poorna Valli. Legend has it that when the Thayar gave bikshai to Siva, the biksha pathram i.e. the Brahma kapalam became full. Hence it is that the Thayar is known as Poorna Valli, poorna meaning complete or full. In no other theertham visited by Siva, did the biksha pathram ever become full. The theertham is known as Kadamba theertham. Kadali viruksham is the sthala viruksham. The vimanam is known as Udyoga vimanam. Perumal appeared in this place to Kadamba Muni, Thirumangai Alwar, Uparisaravasu and Sanaka Sananthana Sanathana Sanath kumarars.

This place is varyingly known as Uttamar koil, Bikshandar koil, Neepa kshetram, Kadamba vana kshetram, Trimurthi kshetram, Adimahapuram.

The name of the Perumal here is Purushothaman which in Tamil is Uttamar. Hence the temple is known as Uttamar koil. As kailasapathi is seen here as Bikshatana murthi in Digambara form begging for alms with his Brahma kapala as biksha pathram, the temple here is also known as Bikshandar koil. It is also known as Pichaiyar koil - pichai in Tamil referring

to begging. While the sannidhi of Purushothama Perumal is facing east, the sannidhi of Siva is facing west. The place is known as Kadamba kshetram as God appeared before Kadamba maharishi. Once upon a time, there were a number of neepa vuruksams here. Neepa meaning Kadamba tree. Hence this place came to be known as Kadamba vana kshetram as also Neepa kshetram. As the Holy Trinity viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva have sannidhis in this single temple, it is known as Trimurthi kshetram. As Brahma, the Adi purusha i.e. the Creator has a separate shrine in this temple, the place is known as Adi Mahapuram.

Once upon a time, the entrance to this temple had no doors at all and God could be worshipped at any time be it day or night. This is evident from the statement made by Periya Vachchan Pillai, the great commentator on Divya Prabandha when he says,

வழிக்கரையில் திருவாசலுக்கு ஒரு கதவிடாதே வந்து
கிடக்கிறவனை சேவிப்பார் மிகுதியாலே கதவிட அவச
ரமில்லை

Besides this religious significance, this place has also got a historical relevance. Its fortified pagoda was the scene of prominent active war-fare during the fight between the English and the French in the 18th century. In 1751-52 when the British and the French armies fought, Captain Gingen is said to have used the precincts of this temple for camping his army. Again, in 1752, the French army garrisoned in Bikshandar koil was attacked by surprise by Chanda Sahib and the French lost the battle to Chanda Sahib. Again in 1759-60, when the French army re-occupied the temple, the British army which was stationed in Tiruchi led by Captain Richard Smith joined the army marching from Samayapuram towards the koil. They met near a satram (inn) six furlongs away from the temple. They used cannons (biranghis) and attacked the armies stationed inside the temple. But suddenly inexplicably a fierce fire emanated from inside the temple and protected the French soldiers from being attacked. In addition, the shoulder of Richard Smith, the British army leader, got hit by a bomb and he was incapacitated.

THE STHALA PURANA:

It is said that once upon a time, when there was a pralaya, the Vedas and other texts approached Lord Siva for advise as to how they could escape from the ravages of the pralaya. Siva then advised them that the vedas assume the form of kadamba viruksham, the agamas should take on the form of flowers, the Ithihasas that of fruits, the puranas that of birds. He advised all of them to go to Kadamba kshetra. It is said that the kadamba vanam in the kshetram consists of all these holy scriptures and texts.

Brahma born out of the nabhi of Narayana was continuing to worship Narayana. One day, God decided to test the depth and sincerity of the prayers of Brahma. He is said to have come to Kadamba vanam, took on the form of the Kadamba viruksham. When Brahma started praying to Lord Narayana, he found that He was not there. He started searching for Perumal. Ultimately he came to Kadamba vana and realised that Narayana was also one among the Kadamba virukshams. He took some water in his kamandalam, poured it on the kadamba trees. The abisheka water which flowed over the trees and then collected in a place became a tank. Brahma repeated the Dwadasakshara mantram. Pleased with the sincerity of the prayers of Brahma, Perumal appeared before him. The tank which was formed out of the water poured on the kadamba viruksham came to be known as Brahma theertham. On the bund of this theertham, later Kadamba rishi did severe penance. God appeared before him also. As Kadamba muni did penance on the banks of this tank, it also came to be known as Kadamba kshetram.

Yet another story connected with this divya desam relates to an incident in the life of Lord Siva. It is said that seeing the Brahma also had five faces, Siva became jealous. He plucked out one face of Brahma and thus committed Brahmahathi. When the fifth face of Brahma was plucked out, it stuck to the fingers of Lord Siva. Siva tried to get rid of this kapalam. But to no avail. To atone for this sin, Siva visited a number of divya kshetrams and eked out his living by begging for alms. A peculiar feature was that whenever he begged for alms and collected

the same in the kapalam, the kapalam would never become full. It would always be half empty. He was told that only when the kapalam becomes full would it be an indication that his sin has been forgiven. In the course of his wandering, Lord Siva came to Kadamba kshetram. Perumal then asked Thayar to give Siva some alms. The grace of Goddess was such that the kapalam got filled up and thus atleast Siva was able to atone for his Brahmahathi dosha. It is believed that Siva continued to stay here as Bikshandar (the beggar). He is seen in a seated posture giving dharshan.

Another story connected with this divya desam deals with the dharshan given by Perumal to Janaka Maharaja. Once upon a time, Janaka Maharishi went on a pilgrimage entrusting his kingdom to the Minister. In course of time, he reached kadamba theertham. As advised by Gowthamar, he took the assistance of Kasyapar and other rishis and decided to perform a yaga. On completion of the yaga, somehow they felt that the desired results were not forthcoming. They realised that something was amiss with the yaga. Janaka felt upset and sad as he regarded this as an ill omen. They all prayed to Perumal. At that time, from nowhere a rishi with his sishyas came along that path repeating the vedas. He looked at Janaka Maharaja and told him, "O Rajarishi! Please pray to this Kadamba viruksham and all your wishes will be fulfilled". Accordingly Janaka Maharaja prayed to the kadamba viruksham. From the viruksham, an asareeri voice from heaven was heard saying, "O King! the yaga became infructuous because unknown to you the havis has been made impure by a wandering dog. As your homa dravyams (articles) were not pure, the yaga is not able to deliver the expected results. Please prepare fresh homa dravyams and your wishes will be fulfilled". Accordingly the yaga was performed afresh. In answer to the prayers of Janaka Maharaja, Lord Narayana lying down on Adishesha with Brahma on the nabhi kamalam and Siva as Bikshadanar staying by the side appeared before Janaka Maharaja and the other rishis assembled there. Janaka Raja is said to have built this temple for the Trimurthis and installed the idols.

It is also said that a king by name Satkirthivarthanan who had no issues came to this place offered sincere prayers to Perumal and in course of time was blessed with a son. As a thanksgiving measure, he built the Udyoga vimanam with five kalasams on the top as well as the mandapam and the prakaras in the temple. Besides on Chithirai pournami day he performed an utsavam for the Perumal, lived here for a long time and then attained moksha.

Another important dignitary who stayed in this place and added to the holiness of the desam was Thirumangai Alwar. While attending to the construction of the vimanam, the gopuram, and the prakaram at Srirangam temple in Tiruchy, Thirumangai Alwar is believed to have stayed in this town viz. Karambanur. As supporting evidence for this fact, even today, on the northern part of Kadamba pushkarini, there are wet lands and adjacent to the lands, there is a thoppu and a mandapam where the Alwar is said to have stayed. The place is known even today as "Alwar patta varthi".

EPIGRAPHICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

A few inscriptions are found in the temple. These are recorded by the South Indian Epigraphical Institute. There is an inscription on the northern wall of Uttamar koil which says that during the 30th year of the reign of the Chola king Udaiyar Rajadhiraja Devaraja Kesarivarma certain lands were gifted for meeting the expenses in offering prayers in the temple. ¹

On the southern wall of the sannidhi of Lord Siva, there is another inscription. This records an incident which occurred in the 10th year of the reign of the Pandya king by name Nayanar Sundarapandya Devan. As per this, specific lands were set apart for meeting the expenses of conducting Poojas in the various temples in Rajaraja Valanadu. ²

¹ Inscription No. 602 South Indian Institute of Epigraphy 1902

² Inscription No.163 South Indian Institute of Epigraphy 1936-37.

There is yet another inscription on the front wall of the sannidhi of the Siva temple. This relates to 1523 Saka Era. This also refers to the residents of Malayapuram also known as Gunaseela Mangalam having donated some lands for meeting the expenses in performing poojas to the Uttamar Koil. This announcement is said to have been made in the presence of Sri Ranganatha Swamy. ³

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has sung in praise of the divya desam. Even he has sung only one pasuram. The same with its meaning is given below:

Peria Tirumozhi - 5-6-2

பேரானை குறுங்குடியெம் பெருமானை திருத்தண்கா
 லூரானைக் கரம்பலூ ருத்தமனை முத்திலங்கு
 காராத்திண் கடலேழும் மலையேழிவ்வுலகேழுண்டும்
 ஆராதென் றிருந்தானைக் கண்டது தென்னரங்கத்தே.

Meaning:

The Lord who (is known as Appakudathan and) is at Thirupaernagar;

The Lord who is also at Thirukurungudi;

The Lord who is also at Thiruthanka;

The Lord who is known as Purushothaman and is at Thiru Karambanur

The Lord who at the time of the great Deluge (Pralaya) swallowed the seven mountains, seven worlds and seven oceans full of pearls and having saved the universe from destruction by keeping them safe inside Him,

yet was considerate and kind as to think what more He could do to us;

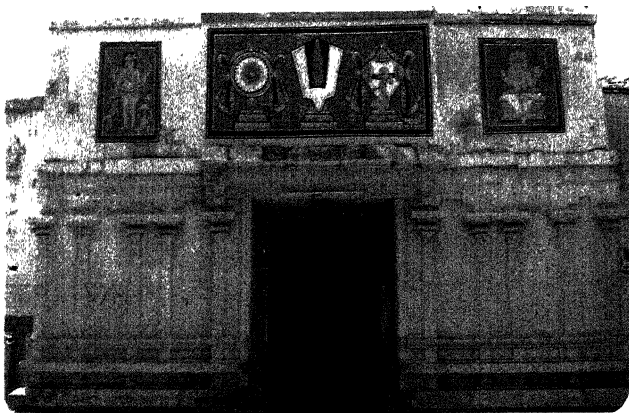
I saw that Lord at Arangam.

³ Inscription No.164 South Indian Institute of Epigraphy 1936-37.



Thiru Karambanur - A View of the Temple

Thiru Karambanur - Temple View





Thiru Karambanur - Utsavamurthi

(The Alwar conveys the idea that God is ever willing and eager to help humanity however much He might have already done for them).

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Tirupathi Andadi

Poem:

சில மாதவம் செய்தும், தீ வேள்வி வேட்டும்
 பல மாந்தியில் படிந்தும் - உலகில்
 பரம்ப நூல் கற்றும் பயனில்லை நெஞ்சே!
 கரம்பனூர் உத்தமர் பேர் கல்.

Meaning:

Oh mind of mine, please realise that in order to lead a good life in this world, it is of no use even if you perform severe penances or perform yagas, or have a purificatory bath in holy rivers or educate yourself by mastering the learned treatises. Instead please, repeat a myriad times the holy name of the Purushothaman at Karambanur. (In brief Pillai Perumal Iyengar's advice is that nama sankeerthanam is the certain answer to solve the worldly problems of mankind).

* * *

THIRU KOZHI (NICHULAPURI URAIYUR)

Thiru Kozhi which is within the municipal limits of Tiruchy town is one of the Chola Nadu divya desams. Thirukozhi is otherwise known as Uraiyr as also Nichulapuri. The moolavar is known as Manavala Perumal. He is seen in a standing posture with the prayoga chakram in His hand. He is facing north. There is no separate sannidhi for the Thayar. She is seen by the side of the moolavar. She is known as Kamalavalli Nachiyar as also Urayur Valli and Vasa Lakshmi. She is seen in a sitting posture. She is also facing north. The moolavar and the Thayar are in their wedding finery and dress. The theertham is known as Kalyana theertham as also Surya pushkarini. The vimanam is known as Kalyana vimanam. God appeared to Dharmavarma the Chola King.

The story is that Sri Ranganatha came all the way from Srirangam to marry Vasa Lakshmi of Nichulapuri, the daughter of the Chola King Dharmavarma. This place is also famous as the birth place of Tiruppan Alwar who wrote Amalan Adipiran. There is a separate sannidhi for Tiruppan Alwar here. In the month of Panguni, on a day prior to Uthiram, the utsavamurthi of Sri Ranganatha comes all the way from Srirangam temple to Uraiyr and the kalyana utsavam with Vasa Lakshmi is celebrated at Uraiyr. Thus annually re-enacting the divine wedding which took place long ago.

Once upon a time, in the Indrasabai, a number of rishis were assembled. They were discussing as to who among the Trinity is the greatest. Some said that Brahma, the four faced God is supreme; others held that Sankara is the most powerful God. Yet others held that Achyuta is the greatest of all. Thus, the knowledgeable as well as the respected sages felt confused as they could not come to a conclusion for the tricky problem. At that time, Trikalā gnani Brighu Maharishi came there. The rishis decided that this tricky issue shall be entrusted to Brighu Maharishi for finding a solution. He agreed. He went to Kailasa first. He was told by the Dwara Palakas that Lord Siva and Parvati were alone and were not to be disturbed. This infuriated the rishi. The Dwara Palakas prevented the rishi from entering

the abode. They virtually pushed him out. The rishi concluded that Lord Siva is not approachable and perhaps suffers from ego and self-importance. He therefore decided He could not be the greatest amongst the Trinity, as He was not easily accessible. In that mood of anger he cursed that Lord Siva will be born as a beggar in the world and that He would never be worshipped in a human form. Hence it is that Siva is worshipped only as a Lingam.

Brighu Maharishi then went to Satya Loka. it was mid day by the time he reached there. He stood before Brahma for a long time. But Brahma was busy in the job of creation and he did not notice the arrival of Brighu Maharishi. The rishi therefore left Brahmaloaka also in a huff and reached Vaikuntam.

When he went to Vaikuntam, the Dwara Palakas informed Vishnu that Brighu Maharishi had come. Vishnu immediately called him inside, made kind enquiries. The rishi felt very happy. The rishi then looked at Vishnu, and desired a separate audience with only the Perumal being present. Immediately, all the people who were surrounding Lord Vishnu left. Lakshmi Devi who has Her place permanently on the chest of Lord Vishnu did not leave. On the other hand, She told Brighu rishi that she wanted to be alone with Her husband and asked the rishi also to leave the room like the other members of the retinue. Hearing this, Brighu rishi got angry. He cursed that Lakshmi also be born in the world in the human race. However, Brighu came to the conclusion that Vishnu was the only God who was the Supreme among the Trinity as He showed absolute kindness and concern to the rishi when he met Him.

In the meantime, Lakshmi Devi felt sad of the curse of Brighu. However, Vishnu consoled Her and said that even if she were to go to the earth, He would follow her shortly. He also added that She would be born in a royal family and that in due course when She would come of age, He would come to the earth and marry Her and that both of them could stay in the bhooloka for the benefit of the devotees there.

In the meantime, on the earth, on the banks of the river Kaveri, there was a forest known as Kararanyam. In that forest, a number of brahmins were living. Their King was Dharmavarma. He belonged to the Ikshvaku vamsam. Once upon a time, the King and his Queen lived in Cholanadu in Kumbakonam. One day he went for a hunt in Kararanyam. He saw all the rishis there doing tapas. He fell in love with the peaceful atmosphere there. At the same time, when he heard from the rishis about the troubles being given to them by the demons, he decided to stay on there and provide protection to the rishis. He built a town in the idyllic surroundings. He named it after the Queen as Nichulapuram. The town was a peaceful place. He helped in celebrating a number of homams and yagams. The only disappointment to the King was that he had no progeny. He approached the rishis there to perform a yaga so that he could be blessed with heirs. At that time, an asareeri voice was heard which asked the King to pray to Lakshmi Devi and assured the King that Thayar Herself would be born as his daughter. Later a son also would be born to them and he would be a great Vishnu baktha. Hearing these pleasant words, Dharmavarma the King performed the Lakshmi Tantra yagam with the help of the rishis and the brahmins there. In response to the sincere prayers, Goddess appeared before them. The Goddess assured that She herself would be born as their daughter. The King and the Queen returned to Nichulapuri. In course of time, in the month of Chithirai, Sukla pakshami dwadasi Uthara nakshathiram on a Friday in the evening a baby girl was born. The King named her as Vasa Lakshmi. After some time, a boy was also born. He was named as Chandra Tilakan. The children were brought up with lot of affection and care. The girl used to play constantly with an idol of Vishnu. In course of time, when she came of age, the King arranged for a swayam varam. A lot of hopeful princess assembled in the sabha. Sri Ranganatha also heard of the swayam varam and He came as a Raja Kumara and He also was seated in the sabha. The moment Vasa Lakshmi entered the sabha and saw Sri Ranganatha, She identified Him as Lord Vishnu and went near him and adorned the garland around the neck of Ranganatha. The King and the Queen celebrated the wedding of Vasa Lakshmi with Sri Ranganatha. The King was very happy as having the

Thayar as his daughter and the Perumal as the son-in-law. The King prayed to the Lord to stay in the same place. He built a big temple for Perumal. After some time, the King entrusted his kingdom to his son and reached Vaikuntam.

This is the sthala purana of Uraiyr otherwise known as Nichulapuri.

HYMNOLOGY:

Thirumangai Alwar and Kulasekara Alwar have sung one pasuram each in praise of the Perumal in this divya desam. The pasuram of Kulasekara Alwar with its meaning is given below:

Poem:

அல்லி மாமலர் மங்கைநாதன் அரங்கம் மெய்யடியா
 ர்கள்தம்
 எல்லையிலடிமைத் திறத்தினில், என்றும் மேவு
 மனத்தனாம்
 கொல்லி காவலன் கூடல் நாயகன், கோழிக்கோன்
 குலசேகரன்
 சொல்லின் இன் தமிழ் மாலை வல்லவர், தொண்டர்
 தொண்டர்களாவரே.

Meaning:

All those who are ever ready to serve the ardent devotees of Lord Ranganatha;

All those who are able to repeat this garland of verses composed in sweet sounding Tamil by Kulasekhara Alwar, the great Chera King who ruled over Kolli hills and also Uraiyr the capital of Chola Kingdom and also Koodal (Madurai) the capital of Pandya kingdom;

Will be blessed by Lord Ranganatha as they are devoutly serving His devotees.

(Alwar is conveying the axiomatic truth that God is as pleased when we serve His devotees as when we serve Him).

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108**Tirupathi Andadi:****Poem:**

சிறப்புடைய செலவத திருப்பதிகள போல
 மறப்புடைய நாயேன மனத்துள - உறப்போந்து
 அறம தையா நின்ற அரங்கா திருவாழ்
 ஹநதையாய இங்கு உறைந்தது ஒது

Meaning:

Oh Lord Ranganatha

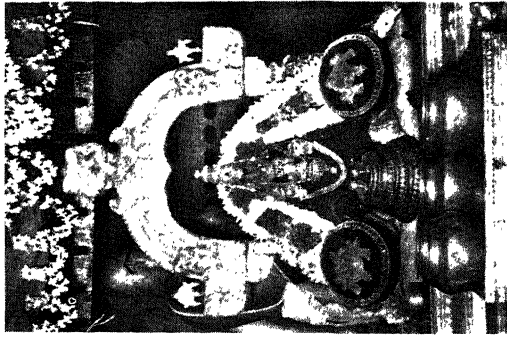
I have a very forgetful mind, but ever since you entered my mind you have made me understand and comprehend very well, the tenets of Dharma -

Lord you who reside at Thuraiyur.

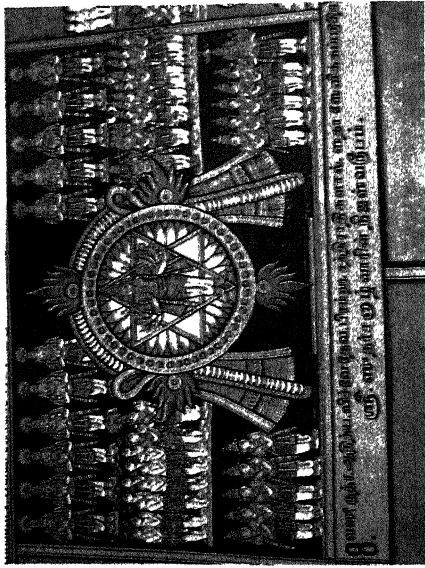
Please let me know what prompted you to so lovingly and permanently stay in my mind as if you are living in the famous divya desams?

Oh Lord please enlighten me on that loving fact.

* * *



Thiru Kozhi - Sri Kamalavalli Nachiyar -
Utsavamurthi

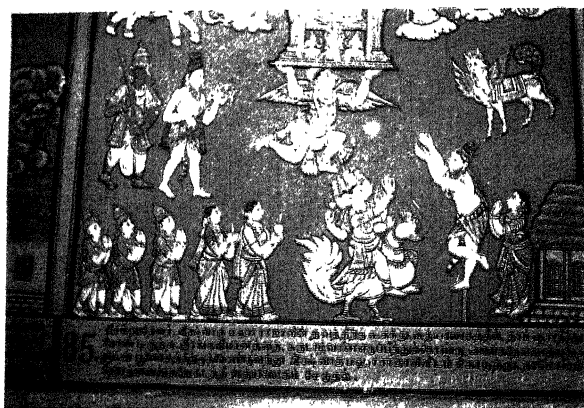


Thiru Kozhi - Beautiful Wall Paintings in Woraiyur Temple



Thiru Kozhi - Beautiful Wall Paintings in Woraiyur Temple

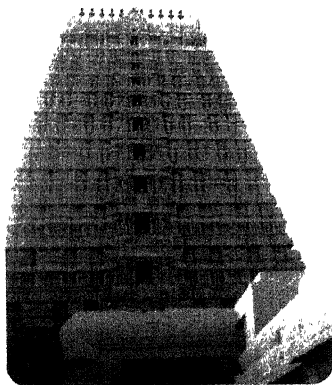
Thiru Kozhi - Beautiful Wall Paintings in Woraiyur Temple

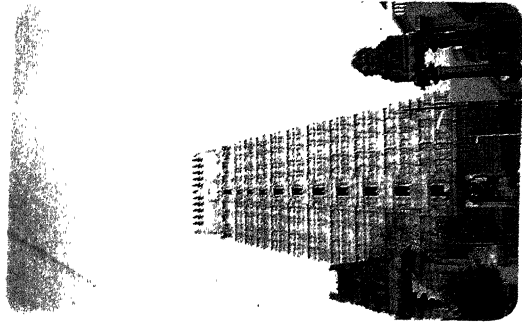




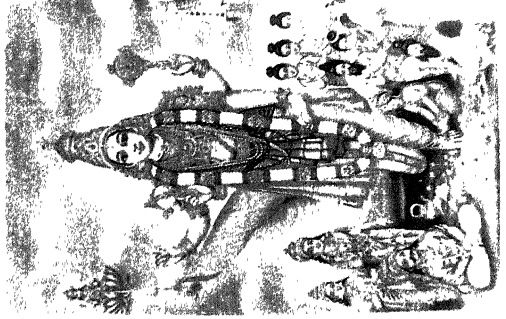
Thiru Kozhi - Beautiful Wall Paintings in Woraiyur Temple

Thiru Kovilur - Temple Tower

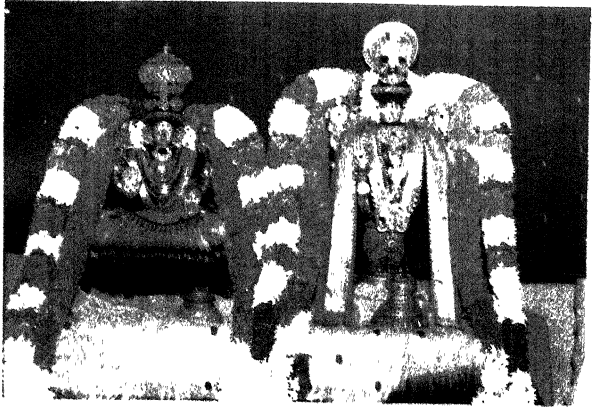




Thiru Kovilur - Gopuram View



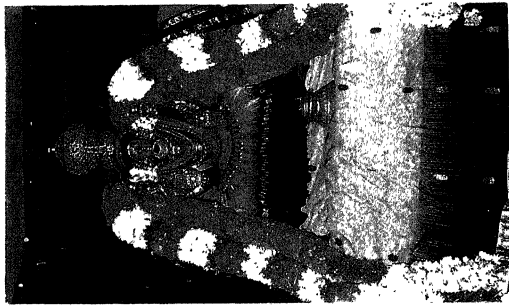
Thiru Kovilur - Thiruvikrama Perumal - Moolavar



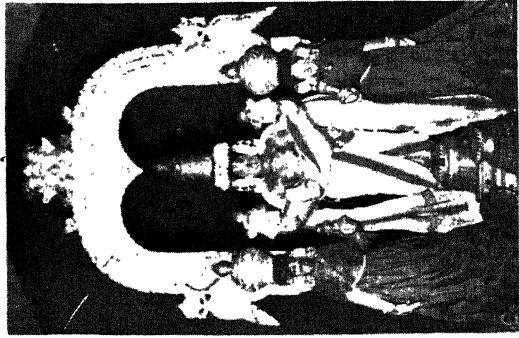
Thiru Kovilur - Sri Degaleesan
& Pushpavalli Thayar Utsavamurthis

Thiru Kovilur - Sri Degaleesan & Pushpavalli
& Ubhaya Nachiar Utsavamurthis





Thiru Kovilur - Sri Pushpavalli Thayar Utsavamurthi



Thiru Kovilur - Thrivikrama Perumal - Utsavamurthis

THIRUKOILUR

Thirukoilur is one among the Nadu Nadu divya desams. Closeby is Srimushnam which is also a famous puranic place. Thirukoilur lies on the Villupuram Katpadi Railway line. The temple is about 2 kms. from the railway station. This is one among the Pancha Krishnaranya Kshetrams. The other four are Thirukannangudi, Kapisthalam, Thirukkanna-puram and Thirukkannamangai. The sthalapurana of this place is related in Brammapuranam as well as in Padmapuranam. The administration of this temple is under the control of Thirukoilur Sri Emberumanar Jeer Swamy.

Thirukoilur is held sacred by Vaishnavites as it is here that the divya prabandham was first composed. The first three Alwars met each other and sang the glories of Lord Vishnu here. It was here, on a stormy night, a way farer who was drenched in the rain asked for shelter at a dehali i.e. a thatched terrace known in Tamil as Rezhi and thanks to the courtesy of the pious householder decided to take shelter there from the severity of nature. Shortly another way farer also seeking shelter came there. There was not enough space to lie down for both. But both of them could sit together. Shortly a third one came seeking shelter. The third was also accommodated saying all of them could stand. The first hailed from Kancheepuram. He was Poigai Alwar. The second was from Mahabalipuram. He was Bhudatalwar. The third was from Mylapore in Madras City and was Peyalwar. They spent the night sharing their religious experiences. Suddenly they felt there was another presence in their midst. As it was dark, they could not find an explanation. They had no light. Then Poigai Alwar sang a poem in Tamil wherein he said that the entire world of matter is a lamp. The ocean is the ghee and the bright Sun is the flame. Bhudathalwar responded by saying that the intense life is the receptacle, yearning is the ghee and the mind pining away in bliss is the wick. Thus, the gnana dipa was lit so as to dispel the darkness of ignorance. As soon as he completed his song, the darkness vanished and the third visitor viz. Peyalwar had the vision of the Lord. He described what he saw and all the Alwars enjoyed this vision and the three bakthas began to sing the

glory of the Lord in 100 verses each. They form part of Iyarpa, a portion of the Divya Prabandham. Thus was born the Divya Prabandham at this sacred place viz. Thirukoilur on a stormy night. This memorable incident naturally attracted the vaishnavite philosopher Vedanta Desika who in his beautiful Tamil poem said that this satya dipa lit in a small insignificant Deheli on a stormy night was able to dispel the darkness throughout the world and illumine the entire path of Vedanta. He also refers to this incident in a sanskrit verse where he compares the Lord to a sugarcane being crushed in a crushing mill consisting of the three Alwars and the resultant sugar-cane juice which is the sweet nectar is the prabandhas. From that night, Lord Vishnu acquired the new names viz. Dehalisa and Bhaktopa meardanarasika. The vision of the three Alwars at Thirukoilur for the first time established the fact that God was neither exclusively purusha or sthri, it was a harmonious blend of the two viz. Thiru Mal wherein Thiru refers to Lakshmi, Mal to Vishnu.

The Vishnu temple here is very big. Bronzes of the first three Alwars are there in the garbagriha. It appears that the major portion of the temple was built during the Nayak rule.

The place also has a famous saivite temple. Though the Siva temple is small, it is one of the eight Samhara kshetrams of Siva known as Attaviratams and here Siva is said to have killed the demon Andhakasura. Even as the Alwars visited the Vishnu temple, Appar and Sambandar are said to have visited the temple of Virateswara at Tirukoilur.

Tirukoilur is famous in ancient Tamil literature as the headquarters of Malayaman chieftains who were known for their valour, generosity and love for literature. Avvaiyar and also Kabilar, two famous Tamil poets are connected with this place. The famous chieftain Pari's daughters Angavai and Sangavai were married here. Kabilar took charge of the girls after the death of his patron and their father Pari. It is said that after performing the marriage of the two girls to a Malaiyaman known as Deivigan, Kabilar committed suicide as he could not bear the separation of his patron Pari. Even now a small rock here is called Kabilar rock and there is a linga which according to tradition was worshipped by Kabilar.

Yet another significant aspect of this divya desam is that this is the place where Sri Desikar wrote his book "Dohalisa Stuti". The idol of Durga inside a vaishnavite temple is also a rather unusual phenomenon. It is believed that Durga came all the way from Vindhya mountains to this place in order to safeguard and protect Perumal. She is believed to be a great giver of boons. Thirumangai Alwar in his pasuram refers to Durga and says "கற்புடைய மடக்கன்னி காவல் பூண்ட"

Even today as soon as neivedhyam and aradhana is performed to the Perumal and Thayar, it is done to Durga.

Moolavar in this place is Thrivikrama. He is seen in a pose with the right leg lifted high as if it has measured the entire heavens. He is seen facing east. The Utsavar is known as Ayanar as also Gopala. The Thayar is known as Poongovai Nachiyar. There are several theerthams in this place. The important ones being Pennai river, Krishna Theertham and Chakra Theertham. The vimanam is Srikara vimanam. God appeared to Balichakravarthi, Mirukandu Rishi, Brahma, Sounaka Rishi, Kasyapa Rishi, Kalava Rishi, Kusadwaja King and to the first three Alwars.

The story of Thrivikrama is too well known to bear detailed repetition. However, suffice it to say that Bali Chakravarthi who was known for his generosity was troubling the Devas. The Devas approached Vishnu for help. Vishnu decided to tackle this generous asura viz. Bali by exploiting his weak point viz. generosity. Vishnu therefore came to this world as the son of Kasyapa rishi and his wife Athithi. He took on the form of a Vamana Murthi. In course of time, this brahmachari went to Bali Chakravarthi and asked for gift of the land which could be covered by his three steps. Bali Chakravarthi agreed. The Vamanan then assumed the Viswaroopa and covered the entire earth with one step, the Heavens with the second step and at the request of Bali put the third step on the head of Bali and pushed him into Pathala. It is said that this Thrivikrama avataram of Lord was at Thirukoilur.

When this avataram took place, Mirukandu Rishi i.e. the father of Markandeya rishi was not at that place. He was doing tapas elsewhere. When he heard about this avataram of the Lord from Brighu Muni, he felt very disappointed at having missed this opportunity of seeing this avataram. He therefore undertook severe penance wanting the God to appear before him in the same form. In course of time, Mirukandu rishi visited Gaya, Pushkaram, Badri etc. and finally reached the bank of Krishnabadra river where the Krishnaranyam forests were located. He reached Krishnapuri and at that kshetram, he was assured by Brahma that his penance would be rewarded by Perumal. One day an old brahmin accompanied by his wife appeared before Mirukandu rishi. The old brahmin said that both he and his wife were very hungry and tired. He wanted food immediately. Mirukandu Rishi went inside his asramam. He knew that in his asramam, there was not even one morsel of food. However, he went inside, asked his wife Mitravathi to somehow do the necessary athithi pooja to the old brahmin and his wife. His wife Mithravathi prayed to Mahalakshmi and thanks to the sincere prayers, she was able to feed the old brahmin and his wife to their complete satisfaction. Immediately, the brahmin appeared in his true form holding the sankhu and the chakra in his two hands. The old couple were none other than Perumal and Thayar. Mirukandu rishi then prayed to God to show him His Thrivikrama roopa so that he who had missed it earlier could derive the divine satisfaction. God obliged and gave him darshan in His Thrivikrama roopa at this place. Mirukandu rishi prayed to God to continue to stay in this form in this place so that other devotees could also have the similar darshan.

Another story connected with this place relates to the atrocities committed by the rakshasa Pathala Kethu who lived in this Krishna kshetram. Once upon a time, in this kshetram, Kalavar Rishi with other Munis was doing penance and praying to Perumal. Pathala Kethu, an asuran, had earlier prayed to Brahma and obtained a boon that he would be invincible. Having attained this boon, he became arrogant. He started troubling the Devas as well as the Munis. The Devas and the Munis therefore approached Vishnu and asked him to rid Krishna kshetram of this asura. Thrivikrama assured them that He

would protect them. In course of time, one day, a King by name Kusadwajan came to Krishnaranya Kshetram. He met Kalavar and other rishis. The rishis felt that the appearance of the King Kusadwajan was in response to their prayers to Perumal. They requested him to protect them from the asura Pathalakethu. The King assured them all help. Even as he assured them, suddenly from nowhere a horse by name Kuvalayam appeared. It was a gift from Sri Hari to Kusadwajan to perform the holy task of killing the asura. The King got on to the horse, chased the asura. The asura took the form of a pig. He entered Kalava Muni's asram and wanted to kill all the rishis assembled there. Kusadwaja Raja chased him into the asramam as well and killed him. Having successfully completed this task, Kusadvajan wanted the rishi to tell him the sure path to attain moksha. The rishi advised him to stay on Krishna kshetam and worship Narayana in that temple. The King acted accordingly. In course of time, God appeared before him and conceded his wish.

It is also believed that Brahma came to Krishna kshetram i.e. Thirukovalur and prayed on the banks of the Krishnabadra river which is now known as Pennai Aru. God appeared before Brahma also in this place and assured him that He would continue to stay in this place in His Archa form and thus enable the rishis and other devotees to have His darshan.

There are a number of theerthams around this place. When God in His Thrivikrama form covered this entire earth with one foot and the other foot covered Brahma loka, Brahma washed the divine feet. The water with which he washed the feet later collected in this place. This is known as Chakra Theertham. It is believed that when Indra was cursed by Durvasa and he lost his Kingdom as well as his wealth, he came to Chakra Theertham, worshipped Thrivikrama and regained his Kingdom through the blessings of Perumal.

Yet another theertham here is known as Sanku theertham. Guhan prayed here and had darshan of Vasudeva. Near sanku theertham lie Pindasthana and Runamosana Theerthams and both these theerthams are of special significance for offering prayers to the pitrus i.e. forefathers.

Yet another theertham in this place is known as Karga theertham. A brahmin by name Sugunan is said to have prayed here and attained Brahmaloaka. Another theertham is known as Akasa Ganga and it is believed that it is on the banks of this Akasa Ganga theertham that Brahma did his penance and realised Thrivikarama. On the banks of Badra nadhi, there is another theertham by name Varsha theertham. On its bank, Parasurama did deep penance, got rid of his sin resulting from the kshatriya vadha done by him earlier. Closeby is Agasthiya theertham where Agasthiya rishi did penance and had the darshan of the Lord. Yet another theertham closeby is known as Kalva theertham where the rishi Kalva did his penance. There is also a Mirukandu theertham. The Krishnabadra river which is now known as Pennai Aru emanates from Sahya Parvatham and is said to be the Ganga theertham with which Brahma washed the feet of Ulagalanda Perumal. (Trivikrama)

Srimushnam, which is not a divya desam, but is a purana sthala, is about 5 kms. from Tirukovilur. As it is one among the swayam vyaktha kshetras, a brief account will be given about the significant aspects of this purana sthalam. The Perumal here is known as Bhoovarahan. The Utsavar is known as Yagna Varahar. The Thayar is known as Ambujavalli. It is said that once upon a time when Lord Narayana was in His yogic sleep in Tirupparkadal, Narada, the Triloka sanchari went there and asked God as to which was the kshetra where one could successfully worship Vishnu. The Lord then replied that He is very fond of His abodes at Srimushnam and Krishnaranyam. The sthala puranam of Srimushnam refers to rescue by God of Bhoomidevi who was abducted by Hiranyakshan. To rescue Her, God took on the form of a varaha. He went deep into the ocean and rescued Bhoomidevi. Hence in this kshetram, He is seen as a Bhoovarahamurthi. The kshetram is also known as Bhoovaraha kshetram. The visit to Thirukovilur can be combined with a visit to Srimushnam as well.

Epigraphical Highlights:

The temple contains a large number of inscriptions. Most important is the record of the 6th year of Rajendradeva II. Ac-

ording to that inscription, the central shrine of the temple which had been built partly of bricks had become old and had cracked. One Ranakesari Raman alias Narasimhavarman belonging to the Bhargava race and reported to be the Governor of the area of the Miladu province had the old building pulled down and re-built the central shrine entirely of fine black granite, set up five stupis and also built the enclosing verandah and a mandapa in front of the temple. He also presented the central deity a canopy of pearls. What is of touching interest is that this gentleman after rebuilding the central shrine got re-engraved on the walls of the new central shrine true copies of the records found on the walls of the earlier structure. ¹

A number of inscriptions relate to the construction of the temple. An undated record mentions that a chief known as Raman Narasinghan put up a gold stupi. ²

Another record relating to the period of the Saluva Narasimhavarman found on the northern wall of the central shrine says that the outer wall and the gopuram had collapsed and were repaired by a certain Annamma Rasa. ³

A record relating to the period of Kulottunga I refers to the conquest of Ratta country and states that the sabha of Tirukovalur recorded on a stone, the boundries of the villages granted to the Perumal temple. A sanskrit verse in honour of Thrivikrama avatar is found above this inscription. ⁴

Another record relating to Vikrama Pandya King refers to his victory over the Kakatiya ruler Ganapati and a gift of two lamps to the temple. ⁵

Another interesting record relating to the period of Chola Keraladeva (Kulottunga III?) speaks of a provision having been made for the recitation of Thiruneduntandakam in the temple. ⁶

¹ ARE 123 of 1900

² ARE 118 of 1900

³ ARE 1 of 1905

⁴ ARE 125 of 1900

⁵ ARE 116 of 1900

⁶ ARE 126 of 1900

Another inscription refers to gifting of lamp free of taxes to Thiruvidaikkali Alwar at Tirukkivilur for the conduct of Tirumanjana ceremony on the day the Uttarayanam and Dakshinayanam. ⁷

Yet another inscription registers a gift of 96 sheep for meeting the expenses towards lighting a perpetual lamp for the deity of Thirukovalur temple of Vasudevan. It also registers the sale of land by the sabha of Thirukovilur for offerings of 10 appam, betel leaves to the deity of the temple on the occasion of Tiruvonam in the month of Aipasi. ⁸

Yet another inscription records the sale of land by the sabha of Madurantaka Chaturvedimangalam to the temple of Thiruvidaikkali Alwar which was declared tax free. The Vaikhasanar of the sthana took charge of the land and agreed to burn a perpetual lamp for the God. ⁹

Yet another inscription refers to the various conquests and victories of the king Rajendrachola I. It also records the sale of land by the sabha of Thirukovalur for feeding Srivaishnavas during the festival in Aippasi for nine days. ¹⁰

Another interesting inscription records the enumeration of the Devadana lands of Thiruvidaikkali Alwar temple at Thirukovalur, the sabha of the village engraved the details on stones and issued aravolai for the same. ¹¹

There are other inscriptions which refer to various gifts made for the temple in the form of 192 sheep for lighting two perpetual lamps for the God, for meeting the expenses for the offerings for service during mid night, the gift of paddy for meeting the food offerings for the shrine including uppambu, milagamudu, neyyamudu, tayiramudu, arecanuts and betel nuts, the gift for repairing the temple etc. ¹²

Another inscription on the northern wall of first prakara of Trivikrama Perumal temple records that every year the agriculturists of Chitrameli Perianadu agreed to give annually one

⁷ ARE 129 of 1900

⁸ ARE 126 of 1900

⁹ ARE 127 of 1900

¹⁰ ARE 128 of 1900

¹¹ 125 ARE 1900

¹² 121, 122, 130, 119, 117, 116 ARIE 1900 App.B

padakku of paddy for each plough and one kuruni for each man to meet the expenses of the temple at Chitrameli Vinnagar alias Tiruvidaikkali.¹³

Another inscription on the northern wall of the first prakara records a gift of 2600 kuli of land to meet the expenses of lighting two continuous perpetual lamps named after the King Vikrama Pandya. The gift was made for the welfare of the King.¹⁴

Another inscription registers an undertaking given by the Tanapatiyar to burn half a perpetual lamp for which 16 cows and one bull were donated by one person. It mentions a liquid measure of Ulagalandan Nali.¹⁵

Yet another inscription registers a royal gift of land to 24 Bhattas of Varada Nayaka Chaturvedimangalam. It also mentions a number of cultivating rice and tax exemptions.¹⁶

On the western wall of the central shrine in the Thirivikrama Perumal temple at Thirukoilur, South Arcot District, there is an inscription relating to the Saluva Deva Narasinga Maharaja King belonging to the Saluva dynasty in Tamil records a gift by the residents of Thirukovilur of certain lands on certain portions of the banks of the river Pennai to God Thiruthoodai Kali Nayanar of Thirukovilur.¹⁷

On the belt of the verandah round the same shrine and on the northern wall of the second prakara of the same temple, there are inscriptions relating to the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajarajadeva which records gift of land by Vanakovaraiyar for seven perpetual lamps to be burnt in the temple and records gift of money by private individual for creating flower garden and for supplying flowers daily to the God to Virasekara Vinnagar in the third prakara of the Perumal temple at Thirukoilur.¹⁸

On the same northern wall relating to the Chola King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Rajadhirajadeva records the purchase from the village assembly of three velis of land and its gift as

¹³ 117 ARIE 1900

¹⁴ 116 ARE 1900

¹⁵ 308 ARE 1902

¹⁶ 307 ARE 1902

¹⁷ 308 ARIE 1921 Appendix B

¹⁸ 309, 310 ARIE 1921 App.B

a tax free devadhana by Malaiyaman Peria Udayan for daily offerings to the God at Thirukoilur.¹⁹

Another inscription records the gift of wet and dry lands for offerings and festivals to the God. It also records that the number of villages and lands which already belonged to the temple and had been assessed were lying uncultivated and that they were now made tax free by Emberumanar Jeer.²⁰

Yet another inscription records the lease free of taxes of the village Puttur belonging to the temple to the agent of Surappa Nayakan for 100 pon per annum to be paid into the temple treasury.²¹

Another inscription records to the gift of certain garden lands by the same individual for the expenses connected with the Vaikasi festival of the God.²²

There is yet another inscription on the northern wall of the second prakara of the Perumal temple at Thirukoilur which records gift of 32 cows and one bull by a devotee for burning a perpetual lamp in the temple of Thiruvidaikkali Nayanar at Thirukkavalur.²³

Another inscription records the gift of 16 cows by a son of a dancing girl of the temple for the daily ghee offering to the God. It mentions a liquid measure Ulagalanda nali.²⁴

Another inscription on the same wall records a tax free gift of land on the Uttarayana day by Rajaraja Chediyarayan of Kiliyur for burning four perpetual lamps in the temple for the merit of his father and himself.²⁵

Yet another inscription records gift of 2800 kasus by a lady for providing offerings to the God on the Uttarayana festival every year out of the interest earned on the gift.²⁶

Yet another inscription records the recovery of the 10 cows by the temple committee from a Srivaishnava brahmin of

¹⁹ 311 ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁰ 312 ARIE 1921 App.B

²¹ 313 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²² 314 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²³ 316 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁴ 317 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁵ 318 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁶ 320 of ARIE 1921 App.B

Thirukovalar in accordance with an entry in the temple accounts of a gift of an equal number of cows to the donee's grandfather for providing curds for feeding certain brahmins. ²⁷

Yet another inscription records the confirmation by the King of a tax free gift of land previously made by Sundara Pandya Deva to certain brahmins of the village of Kudamurutti for the recitation of the vedas by three persons daily in front of the Perumal in the temple of Thirukovilur. ²⁸

Yet another inscription registers that certain lands which were sold at a loss to the temple by the tenants owing to their inability to pay the taxes and that when Immadi Narasa Nayaka visited the temple, he made those lands tax free and ordered the profits thereon to be utilised for offerings and worship to the God on certain days every month. ²⁹

Another inscription mentions that the King exempted the payment of taxes on the 18 ma of land which was granted for offerings and worship to the image of Nachiyar. ³⁰

There are a number of inscriptions mentioned in ARIE 1921 which record donation of tax free lands as well as cows, bulls etc. for lighting perpetual lamps in the temple and meeting the expenses for celebrating various festivals and for creating flower gardens and coconut palms and even for the maintenance of gardeners for looking after the gardens. There are also inscriptions which refer to donors reclaiming unsalable waste land belonging to the temple handing it back to the temple for meeting the expenses for feeding Srivaishnavas who have come to worship the God or for meeting the expenses towards the offerings and daily worship to the God. ³¹

Another inscription records that a lady made a gift of seven kalanju of gold to the assembly of Chandrasolachaturvedi Mangalam for conducting the festival for Aippasi and Vaikasi months and for daily recitation of Thiruvoimozhi and for offerings to the God. After receiving the gift, the assembly set apart a portion

²⁷ 327 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁸ 329 of ARIE 1921 App.B

²⁹ 330 of ARIE 1921 App.B

³⁰ 331 of ARIE 1921 App.B

³¹ 339, 340, 341, 342 of ARIE 1921 App.B

of the temple land for this purpose and utilised the balance of money for completing the repairs of the southern prakara of the temple.³²

There is also another interesting inscription which records gift of paddy by Vaishnavas and other temple servants from their respective incomes from the temple for offerings and garlands to Alagiyamanavala Perumal and for maintenance of a gardener for maintaining the flower garden at the temple. Apparently, contributions from the salaries for meeting such expenses were a habit in vogue even then.³³

On the eastern wall of the prakara of the Perumal temple records a gift of one veli of land by purchase for feeding the Sri Vaishnavas of the Thirumalisai Alwar Thirumaligai Matha attached to the temple of Thiruviddakkali and authorises the brahmins of the village to supervise the charity. This land was exempted by the King from payment of the taxes due to him.³⁴

Another interesting inscription records gift of house sites to the temple servants on both sides of a new street called Bhogarajap-perunderuvu opened out close to the big gopuram at Thirukovilur.³⁵

Another interesting inscription records that certain Vaishnavas residing in the Emberumanar- Jiyar Sannidhi Street agreed to occupy the houses newly built in the square founded as a charity and promised to look after the future repairs of the buildings themselves.³⁶

There are a lot of inscriptions which register gift of sheep, cows for burning perpetual lamps in the temple, some records tax free gift of land or grant of kasus for meeting the expenditure for burning the lamp in the temple.³⁷

One interesting inscription records the scale of emoluments to be paid in kind to the several servants doing service in the temple.³⁸

³² 343 ARIE 1921 App.B

³³ 346 ARIE 1921 App.B

³⁴ 349 ARIE 1921 App.B

³⁵ 356 ARIE 1921 App.B

³⁶ 357 ARIE 1921 App.B

³⁷ 243 to 266 ARIE 1934-35 App.B

³⁸ 253 ARIE 1934-35 App.B

Another inscription refers to a tax free gift of 1000 kulis of land and house site at Thirukovilur to a person for performing the nattuvam service in the temple.³⁹

Yet another inscription registers gift by the Tanattars of a coconut thope to the temple for the merit of a person and in recognition of his having made repairs to the temple.⁴⁰

There are also certain inscriptions which record the gift of taxes for burning lamps in the shrines for the merit of the King by the subjects.⁴¹

An important Vaishnavite shrine at Sri Mushnam had been attributed to the Naik Kings of Tanjore also has a few inscriptions which are of interest. On the steps leading to Venugopalaswami shrine in the Bhuvavarahaswami temple at Srimushnam, there is a record to the effect that certain buildings were erected by a chief of Udaiyarpalayam.⁴²

On one of the walls in the same Venugopalaswami shrine, there is an inscription in Telugu relating to 1583 AD which records a private grant to the temple in the reign of Sri Rangaraya I of Tenekondur.⁴³

On the whole the Srimushnam temple is rather poor in epigraphical evidences.

Some more inscriptions reported in ARIE 1958-59 makes interesting reading. On the eastern and northern walls of the Srimushnam temple, there is an inscription relating to Parakesarivarman Vikramachola King which records a gift of 24 kasu for the purchase of land and out of the income derived from that land, two perpetual lamps were to be burnt in the temple of the God at Srimushnam.⁴⁴

An inscription found on one of the step stones on the eastern side of the tank called Nitya pushkarini in the Srimushnam village states that the dilapidated steps of the tank were repaired out of his own money but Gndappa Rayar, the head Sirashtadar of Tanjore District and that one Uppu Venkatarayar supervised the work.⁴⁵

³⁹ 254 ARIE 1934-35 App.B

⁴⁰ 255 ARIE 1934-35 App.B

⁴¹ 260, 265 ARIE 1934-35 App.B

⁴² 145 of ARIE 1898

⁴³ 193 V.Rangacharya Vol.I Sri Mushnam

⁴⁴ 357 ARIE 1958-59 App.B

⁴⁵ 361 ARIE 1958-59 App.B

Another inscription is found in the mandapa in the Nitya pushkarini tank. The script is Maratti script. It records the erection of the mandapa by one Kosadi Tarin Annagi.⁴⁶

Hymnology:

Amongst the Alwar, three Alwars have sung in praise of the deity here. Tirumangai Alwar has composed 18 pasurams, Poigai Alwar has composed 2 and Bhuttattalwar 1 pasuram respectively. In the following pages, one pasuram from Poigai Alwar viz. 77th pasuram from Mudal Tiruvandadhi and one pasuram from Bhuttattalwar viz. second Tiruvandadhi - 70th pasuram and one from Tirumangai Alwar viz. Pasuram No.2-10-8 from Peria Tirumozhi are given with their meanings:

Poigai Alwar Mudal Tiruvandadhi

77th Pasuram:

வேங்கடமும் விண்ணாகும் வெஃகாவும் அஃகாத
பூங்கிடங்கின் நீள்கோவல் பொன்னாகும் - நாள் கிடத்தும்
நினரூன் இருந்தான கிடந்தான நடந்தானே
எனரூல் கெடுமாம் இடர்.

Meaning:

All our troubles will vanish

When we say that the Lord stood (ninran), sat (Irundan), lay down (kidanthan), walked (Nadanthan) respectively at Thiruvengadam, Srivaikuntam, Thiruvehkaa and at Thirukovalur with its tanks full of flowers.

Bhuttattalwar second Tiruvandadhi

70th Pasuram:

தமருள்ளம் தஞ்சை தலவையரங்கம் தன்கால்
தமருள்ளுந் தன் பொருபடி வேலை - தமருள்ளும்
மாமல்லை கோவல் மதிட்குடந்தை யென்பரே
ஏவல்ல எந்தைக்கு இடம்.

⁴⁶ 364 ARIE 1958-59 App.B

Meaning:

The places where God the great destroyer of all enemies stays
are

In the heart of His devotees; -

In Tanjai Mamani Kovil; -

In Srirangam -

In Tiruthankal -

In Thirumalai ever in the minds of devotees -

In Thiruparkadal -

In Thirukadalmallai ever in the thoughts of devotees -

In Thiru Kovalur -

In Thiru Kudanthai -

(Perhaps these are the Navatirupathis of Bhuttat Alwar).

Tirumangai Alwar Peria Tirumozhi 2-10-8:

பாரேறு பெரும்பாரம் தீரப் பண்டு

பாரதத்துத் தூதியங்கு பார்த்தன செல்வத்

தேரேறு சாரதியாய் எதிர்ந்தார் சேனை

செருக்கோளத்துத் திரவழியசத் செற்றான் தன்னை

போரேறென் றுடையானும் அளகைக் கோளும்

புரந்தரனும் நான்முகனும் பொருந்தும் ஊர்போல்

சீரேறு மறையாளர் நிறைந்த செல்வத்

திருக்கோவலுரதனுள் கண்டேன் நானே.

Meaning:

I saw

At Thirukovalur -

Which looks like the abodes of Rishaba vahananan Shiva,
Kubera, Indran and Brahma

Which place is also full of vedic scholars -

That God

Who when the epic Mahabharata war was to start took on
the role of an envoy to plead the just cause of Pandavas with
Kauravas

And

Who later when the epic war started Himself acted as the

charioteer for Arjuna and fought the war and destroyed the enemies.

Divyakavi Pillai Perumal's 108

Tirupathi Andaadhi:

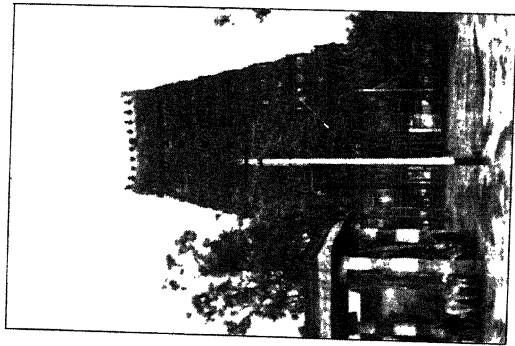
Poem:

தாமரையானாதியாய்த் தாவரங்களீனான
சேம வுயிருஞ் செகமனைத்தும் - பூமடந்தைக்
காங்கோ வலாயுதகன் பின்னால் அவதரித்த
பூங்கோவலாயன் பொருள்.

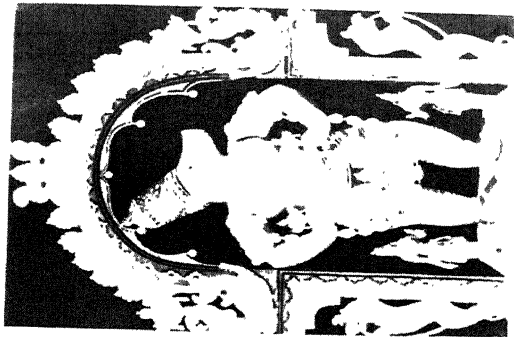
Meaning:

All the items in Creation starting from Brahma to trees and all living things, all the worlds are the creation of the Perumal of Thirukoilur Who is the Lakshmiipathi and who was born after Balarama.

* * *



Sri Mushnam Temple Tower View

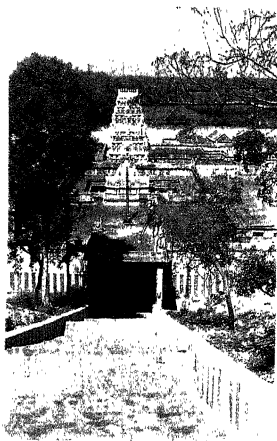


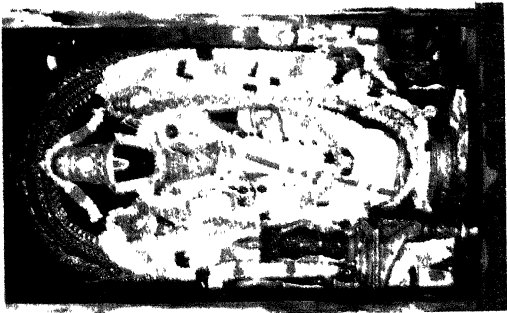
Sri Mushnam Temple Hayagrivar



Thiruvahindrapuram - Temple View

Thiruvahindrapuram - Temple View





Thiruvahindrapuram - Sri Devanathan - Moolavar



Thiruvahindrapuram - Sri Lakshmi Hayagrivar
Moolavar & Utsavars



Thiruvahindrapuram - Thayar - Moolavar

Thiruvahindrapuram - Utsavamurthis





Thiruvahindrapuram - Sri Yoga Hayagrivar

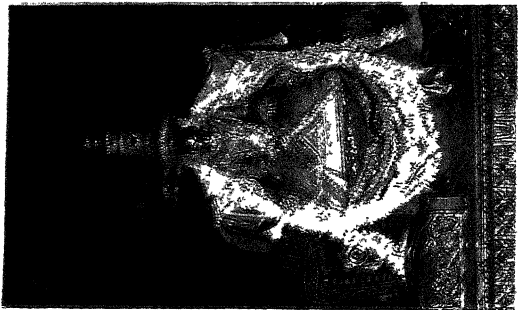


Thiruvahindrapuram - Sri Hayagrivar



4. * * * * *
 5. * * * * *
 6. * * * * *

Thiruvahindrapuram - Sri Desika



Thiruvahindrapuram Sri Desika

THIRUVAHINDRAPURAM

Thiru Vahindrapuram is one of the divya desams in Nadu Nadu. Thiruvahindrapuram is about five kms. from Cuddalore, in South Arcot District in Tamil Nadu. It is well connected by road. The story relating to this divya desam is mentioned in five chapters in Brahmanda puranam and four chapters in Skanda puranam and also in five chapters in Brahannaradiya puranam.

The moolavar here is known as Deivanayakan. He is seen in a standing posture facing east. The Lord here is praised as the manifestation of the Trinity of Hinduism viz. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, all in one form. Alwar speaks of Him as Moovar Agiya Oruvan. Literally translated it means three Gods who have merged and manifested themselves into one form. The idol thus reveals the triple functions of God viz. Creation, Sustenance and Destruction. On the palm of the right hand can be seen a lotus flower, the symbol of Brahma. Third eye which is the symbol of Siva can be seen in the forehead of the utsava murthy. The matted hair on the head of the utsavamurthi is also representative of Siva. The shanku and chakra the symbols of Vishnu are held in two hands. The Thayar is known as Hemambujavalli as also Vaikunta Nayaki. Theerthams are Garuda nadhi, Chandra theertham, Sesha theertham. The vimanam is known as Chandra vimanam as also Suddha sattva vimanam. God appeared to Garuda, Adisesha and Siva.

One of the principal attractions in the temple complex is the exquisite image of Rama with Sita, Lakshmana and Anjaneya. A shrine for Vedanta Desika the great spiritual head also forms part of the temple.

The temple is a 11th century Chola structure. The gopuram was constructed later. On the eastern side of the temple is a hillock known as Oushadagiri on which stands a shrine for Hayagriva reached by a flight of steps. Legends state that sages have taken the form of medicinal herbs on the hillock. The name Thiru Vahindrapuram has its origin in Ahi meaning serpent. Ahindra refers to Sarapa raja i.e. Adisesha who created and built this town.

Struck by the grandeur of the idol of Rama in this temple Desika, contributed the outstanding hymn Raghuvira Gadhyam which is the epitome of the Ramayana. The temple of Devanatha in Thiru Vahindripuram is situated on a beautiful bend of the river Gadilam which is also known as Garuda nadhi in Vaishnavite literature. The river Gadilam and the hillock Oushadagiri add to the enchanting beauty and hallowed surrounding for the temple which is situated between these two natural scenic splendours. The temple is majestic and breath takingly beautiful.

There is a separate temple for Hayagriva on Oushadagiri. Hayagriva is the form of Lord Vishnu where the Lord has the face of a horse. Hayagriva was the Ishta devata of Vedanta Desika whose life is very closely intertwined with the history of this place. In this temple, there is a very beautiful bronze idol of Hayagriva. It is a very rare image. There is also another bronze of Hayagriva inside the main temple and tradition has it that this idol of Hayagriva inside the main temple is the one which was worshipped by Vedanta Desika himself.

The temple has become famous and the village has also become sacred because of the great Vaishnavite saint Vedanta Desika. Originally he hailed from Kanchipuram, but he settled down at Thiruvahindrapuram to worship the presiding deity. Inside the main temple, there is a separate shrine for Desika and there are festivals celebrated separately for him. The utsava bhara of Desika is very attractive. Even today, we can see the house where Desika lived. It is situated on the western row of the main street in the village. There is also a well which was reportedly built by Desika himself, after a mason challenged him to build one if he deserved the title of Sarvatantra Swatantra. Till recently, Desika's Sathumurai day was declared as a District holiday by the State Government. The annual festival for Desika in September-October of every year is a very popular and grand function in this temple. Desika is worshipped here both as God and as an acharya. It is also said that the icon of Desika available in the temple was made by himself. It is here at the age of about 20 years Desika did penance on the hill and secured the grace of Hayagriva.

As the life history of Desika is inter-twined very closely with this divya desa, a brief account is given here of his life and glory. Desika was born to Ananthasuri and Thothar Amba in Tuppil, a suburb of Kanchi. He was called Venkatanatha by his father. His maternal uncle Athreya Ramanuja more popularly known as Appillar brought him up and educated him. By the time he was 20, Desika mastered all the branches of learning both secular and spiritual. He moved from Kanchi to Thiruvahindrapuram and settled there. Tradition has it that Desika was a contemporary of Vidyaranya who invited him to Vijayanagar where he was the prime minister of the emperor. He offered his royal patronage if he moved to Vijayanagar. Desika declined the offer and wrote Vairagya Panchakam and sent the same to Vidyaranya. This act of declining royal patronage reminds one of a similar attitude shown by Thyagaraja when the kings offered him riches if he went to their sabha. The Saint Thyagaraja then declined the offer and said he prefers the Sannidhi of Rama to the sukham i.e. happiness that could come from nidhi (wealth). The foundation of visishtadvaita philosophy was laid by Tanka, Dramida and Guhda Deva and Bodhayana. Saint Alavandar and Ramanuja built a beautiful edifice on that foundation. But it was left to Desika to enrich it further. Vedanta Desika has written many works expounding Vishishtadvaita philosophy in Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit. A good many of those books are lost but those which have been saved are themselves large in number, be it drama, poetry, philosophy or Tamil prabandhams. He had great regard, love and affection for Ramanuja. It almost appeared as if his love for God was only next to his bakthi towards Ramanuja as evidenced from number of his works. Desika's contribution to vaishnavism is the concept of divine couple as Tatva, hita and purushartha and his synthesis of the Sanskrit. Vedanta and the Alvar's Tamil works into a homogeneous Ubahaya vedanta. Thus long ago, Desika was the first acharya to publicly celebrate the union of Sanskrit and Tamil and brought about an integration in the religious thoughts expressed in the two classical languages. It will not be an exaggeration if we say that he was the first to have bridged the North and the South, the Aryan and the Dravidian streams. Tradition says that Lord Ranganatha was so pleased at this achievement of Desika that he bestowed on him the title 'Ubhaya Vedanta'. This place viz.

Thiruvahindrapuram was the centre of Desikar's multifarious activities and thus any history of Thiruvahindrapuram is not complete without mentioning at least in brief the history of Desikar.

There are quite a few sthala puranas connected with this place. As stated earlier, the stories are gathered from Brahmanda purana, Skanda purana and Brahannaradiya purana. Let us first relate the story where God Vishnu revealed in Himself the Trinity.

Once upon a time, in Tirupapuliur, Lord Sankara was standing for a long time and praying to Devadinatha. At that time an asareeri voice told Sankara that Janardhana would shortly appear before him. it advised him to go to the banks of Garuda nadhi closeby and pray to Lord Devanatha. Accordingly, Siva went to the banks of the Garuda river and prayed to Lord Jagannatha. God appeared before him. Siva then asked for help from Vishnu to kill the mighty asuras Tripurasuras. Vishnu promised him all assistance. He said that Brahma would be used as the sarathi, Maha meru would be the dhanus, Bhoomi would be used as the ratham, Chandra and Surya as the great wheels, Vasuki as the bow string rope and the four oceans as the quiver i.e. pouches holding the arrows, the vedas would become the horses. Lord Vishnu said He would become the arrow which can be let loose from Lord Sankara's bow. Vishnu thus promised that with the combined might, they would be able to kill the asuras. He gifted a bow to Lord Sankara, the latter took that bow which could act at a pace reportedly faster than even the thought process in one's mind. The fierce battle with Tripurasuras started.

A virtual river of blood flowed. The asuras got very angry. Sankara chased them to Thiruvahindrapuram near the temple of Devanatha and killed them. While this was so, the river of blood became a flood and dragged Lord Siva in its flow. It was flowing eastwards to join the sea. The devas became very worried as they found that Siva was being swept off his feet towards the ocean. Devanatha then went to the sea shore, took on the form of Gopala and played divine music on his flute. On

hearing this melodious music Samudraraja was very happy. He rose out of the sea paid his respects to Devanatha and Baghavan then ordered Samudraraja to bring back Sankara. Accordingly Samudraraja released Sankara. This is one story as to how Devanatha helped Sankara to fight the asuras. As proof of this story even today on Pournami day i.e full moon day in the month of Masi (Feb-Mar) a festival is celebrated. During that festival Lord Siva of Tiruppapuliur i.e. Patalipuram is taken into the sea. As soon as the idol enters the sea Devanathan also gets into the sea and the Theerthavari utsavam is celebrated. Sri Desikan refers to this in Desika Sookthi when he says 'Masi Kadal adi Mazhindu varu veerae' i.e have a sea bath in the month of Masi and be happy.

There is yet another story related by Sutha muni to Sounaka and other mahamunis. Once upon a time, the devas and the asuras were fighting with each other to establish the superiority of one over the other. The asuras were promised all help by Siva and the devas by Vishnu. Apparently, this entire issue of taking sides by Siva and Vishnu would have been a maya by itself. A fierce battle occurred between them. Lord Vishnu lent His chakra to the Devas and Siva lent His sulam to the asuras. The chakra chased the asuras and they reached Oushadagiri mountain. The disc i.e. chakra captured even sulayudham. Siva was thus forced to come to the battle field himself to fight the chakra. He found that all his weapons were of no avail before the angry chakra. Lord Siva opened His third eye. Even that had no effect on Chakratalwar. It was almost like lighting a candle in bright day light. Vishnu tried to recall chakra. But Chakratalwar requested Vishnu not to recall him. He said he would not return until and unless he defeated the armies of the asuras. Baghavan who saw all this went himself to the Oushadagiri. He appeared before Chakratalwar in His beautiful form. On seeing that, Sudarsan Alwar became calm and peaceful. He controlled his anger. Seeing him calm the people also lost their fear. Pushpa vrishti fell from the sky, the deva dundubis were heard. Sankara also overcame his fear and approached Narayana to return the sulam spear which was earlier given to him by Narayana and taken away by Chakratalwar during this fight. That was the time when Perumal gave darshan

to Rudra as manifestation of the Holy Trinity. God revealed His Mummurti form to Sankara in this place. The divine form which was shown by God showed that in the body of Narayana, Sankara as well as Parvati were a part. Baghavan then took the sulam out of his body and returned it to Rudra. Baghavan then continued to show His form in which Lakshmi was seated on His chest and from his nabhi Brahma arose. In His face devas and brahmins were seen, in His hands were seen the kings and the princes, in His thighs the vysyas and in His feet the Sudras. In addition, in his body God revealed the Ekadasa Rudrars i.e. the manifestation of Lord Siva in eleven forms. Further within one muhurtham, Sankara was able to see all the worlds. He then requested Devadinatha to continue to stay in the same place in the Trimurthi form and continue to give darshan to all the devotees. He also requested Vishnu to permit him to stay in Patalipuram which is close to Thiruvahindrapuram. That place is now known as Thiruppapuliyur near Cuddalore Town. Both these wishes of Sankara were granted by Narayana.

It is said that after this battle, Narayana was tired and thirsty and wanted water. Baghavan asked Garuda to get some water. Perumal waited for some time. As Garuda did not return, he asked Adisesha to go and collect some water without delay. Adisesha then got down from Oushadagiri and he straight hit the earth thus splitting it. Water came gushing out. He took that water and gave it to Perumal. That divya theertham pleased the Perumal very much. Baghavan said that henceforth that theertham will be known as Sesha theertham. When Garuda who went to collect water from Viraja nadhi entered Madhuvanam belonging to Sugreeva, there, under a grove, he saw a muni who was doing pooja. That muni had in his Kamandalam Viraja theertham which he had obtained by his devotion and sincere prayers. Garuda tilted the kamandalam with his nose and wanted to divert the water to Oushadagiri where God was waiting to quench His thirst. The rishi saw the water flowing out of the kamandalam. He got angry and cursed that the water should become impure. Garuda realised his folly. He sought forgiveness from the muni and then with his blessings diverted the water as a river to Vahindrapuram. But when Garuda went there he realised that Sarparaja had already quenched the thirst

of Perumal. Garuda was crest fallen. Perumal told him that he need have no regrets; He said that while Sesa theertham would fulfil the wishes of all the people and will give mukthi to the people who have their bath in that theertham, the river brought by Garuda will thenceforth be known as Garuda nadhi and will be considered as equivalent to Ganga. Even today, the Sesa theertham is within the Devadi Nada Temple precincts opposite to the kitchen. It is the water from this well which is used for preparing all the neivedhyams for the Lord. The Garuda nadhi flowing behind the temple is used for performing thirumanjanam for the Perumal. It is believed that the river brought by Garuda is Viraja theertham while the water brought by Adisesha is pathala Ganga theertham.

In certain parts of the country milk is offered to ant hills where the snakes reside But in Thiruvahindrapuram alone in the month of Thai and Adi (January-February and July- August) this practice of pouring milk into the ant hills is not there. Instead, the milk is poured into the Sesa theertham itself which is situated in the prakara of the temple.

It is said that once Brighu Maharishi did a severe penance to Lord Vishnu. He went to the Sesa theertham. He met an old brahmin there. The brahmin was wearing a tulasi mala. He said that his name was Taporasi. He told Brighu Maharishi that Bhoomidevi had also done penance in that area and that with the blessing of Adisesha he was knowledgeable. When Brighu asked him for advice as to which was the ideal place to pray to Lord Vishnu, Taporasi told him to go to the forest closeby and pray to Mahavishnu. He said that in course of time he would find a small girl who would be seated on a lotus. He advised him to bring Her up as his daughter. At that time, Taporasi assured Brighu that his tapas would be fulfilled. Accordingly, Brighu Maharishi prayed for a long time. In course of time, he did find a small child seated in a lotus. He took her home, gave her to his wife. The child was brought up with love and affection. As she was the daughter of Brighu she was known as Bhargavi. In Tamil Nadu there are only two places where the Thayar is known as Bhargavi. One place is Thiruvahindrapuram, the other is at Adanoor in Chola Nadu. The Thayar is also known as

Hemambujanayaki as she was found in a golden lotus. She was all the time thinking of Narayana. One day Devanatha came to Brighu Maharishi and asked for permission to marry Hemambujavalli, his adopted daughter. Brighu agreed to give Hemambujavalli in marriage to Vishnu. When Brighu saw his adopted daughter leaving to take her rightful place on the chest of Lord Mahavishnu, he felt very sad at the impending separation. To save Brighu from that sadness God blessed that Brighu also may stay along with Perumal at that place and continue to see his adopted daughter. Thus, in Thiruvahindrapuram, Brighu Maharishi is seen in the garbagriha to the left of Devanatha Perumal.

Yet another story was related by Sutha Maharishi to the other rishis. Once upon a time the Devas as well as Indra lost their divine powers (devatvam). There was a rishi by name Kasyapa. His wife was Dhiti. They had a son by name Viruttiran. Once Viruttiran was doing severe penance. Narada came and asked Viruttiran for food which he had offered as neivedhyam i.e. offering to the God. Realising that Narada, the son of Brahma was asking for food, Viruttiran did all the honours to the guest. Narada was pleased. Viruttiran then requested Narada to tell him the method by which he could attain his desire to rule over a kingdom and gain an opportunity to do a lot of dharma, attain fame and defeat the enemies. Narada advised Viruttira to pray to Janardhana. In course of time, he said he would become the king of Aryavarttha desam. He asked him to perform 100 aswamedha yagams. Viruttiran acted accordingly and became invincible. He was able to defeat the devas. Later, he defeated Indra himself, got control over Amaravati. Indra and Indrani had to run away from Amaravati. They went to Oushadagiri and there in a tank, Indra hid himself in the stalk of a lotus. The devas were scared. They searched for Indra who had ruled them well and with dharma. They went to Kailasa, asked Lord Siva about the whereabouts of Indra. He advised them to go to Thiruvahindrapuram where Indra was staying. The rishis accordingly went to Thiruvahindrapuram. But they could not locate Indra. They again went to Tirupparkadal. They met Lord Vishnu and asked him as to where they could find Indra. The Lord assured them that they would soon meet

Indra. He also asked them to go back to Vahindrapurm to perform a yaga there and in Lakshmi theertham, they would find Indra hiding in the stalk of a lotus flower. He asked them to praise Indra and assured them that on hearing the praise, Indra would come out of his hiding. He said that later Vishnu Himself would appear in His archa form at Thiruvahindrapuram and help the Devas. Accordingly, the Devas went again to Thiruvahindrapuram. They went to Lakshmi theertham. They performed the yaga. They praised Indra who joined them. They all had their bath in Garuda nadhi and offered prayers to Devanatha. Lord appeared before them. He gave Indra a vajrayudham. Perumal created this weapon out of the back bone of the Rishi Dadeechi. He assured him that with the help of that vajrayudham he would defeat the asuras and regain control over the three kingdoms. Indra with the help of vajrayudham fought Viruttira Suran. He threw the weapon at the head of Viruttiran. Viruttiran fell down dead. Devendra returned to his kingdom. But when he went to Indraloka, the Devas refused to allow him to enter as he had committed Brahmahatti dosha and insisted that he absolve himself of the sin before regaining his kingship. Indra came back to Thiruvahindrapuram, had his bath in Garuda nadhi and Sesha thirtham and prayed to Devanadha. Thus he was able to finally get rid of his Brahmahatti dosham.

Markendeya rishi also wanted to attain moksha. During his travels, he reached Sougandika vanam. In this vanam, the shenbaga trees were always in flower and the beautiful scent of the shenbaga flower filled the entire atmosphere. In Sugamdika vanam there was a mountain by name Oushadagiri. He stayed there and did deep penance. One day, while he was performing the yaga, an asareeri voice was heard. It said O Muni, Narayana along with Lakshmi is staying in this place. On the conclusion of your yaga, you will see in the Brahma theertham a lotus. In the midst of that lotus, a three year old child by name Haripriya will be seen. You bring her up as your daughter and then all your wishes will be fulfilled. Hearing this, he was very happy. He had his bath, prayed to Lord Narayana. In course of time, he found the child on the lotus. He brought her up. The child used to go to the seashore and enjoy seeing the waves lashing the coast. The muni who noticed her abundant love and

affection towards the sea named her Taranga mukha Nandhini. He continued to stay in Oushadagiri. One day, Lord Narayana appeared and asked the rishi what he wanted. Markandeya then said that because of his earlier prayers, he had been blessed with longevity. But he was not happy with the longevity as wherever he went, he saw sorrow. He wanted the Lord to show him a place where there will be no sorrow. He said that an asareeri voice had promised that his wish would be fulfilled only at Oushadagiri. He therefore asked the Lord to give him moksha. He also desired that as he was able to attain the Lord through Taranga mukha Nandhini, God should continue to stay in the same place along with Taranga mukha Nandini and give moksha to all those who prayed at that spot. God conceded these wishes. Taranga mukha Nandhini was none other than Goddess Mahalakshmi. God also assured that he would give a place by His side to Markandeya rishi also so that he would never be separated from Mahalakshmi. Hence it is that Markandeya rishi also is seen in the temple at Thiruvahindrapuram.

The Oushadagiri itself has got an interesting story about its origin. During the epic war between Rama, Lakshmana and Ravana, one day, Lakshmana swooned and fell down on the battle field. Hanuman was sent to collect some herbs from Sanjeevi mountain. It is believed that while Hanuman was carrying the Sanjeevi mountain, enroute a portion fell down at Thiruvahindrapuram. That came to be known as Oushadachalam. A number of rishis and munis staying in this place worshipped Lord Vishnu. All the trees and plants in that mountain are none other than the rishis and the munis who are praying to Lord Vishnu hoping to attain moksha. There is a Hayagriva sannidhi on the top of the mountain. Vadagalai vaishnavite acharya Sri Swami Desikan did his penance here and had the darshan of the Lord as Hayagriva. In commemoration of the tapas done by Swamy Desikan here, there is a Sri Desika tapo mandapam built on that hill.

Epigraphical Highlights:

There are a number of inscriptions available in the Thiruvahindrapuram temple. One inscription on the northern wall of

the mandapa in front of the Devanayaka Perumal shrine records a gift of 20 velis of land for the temple to meet the requirements of the kitchen as well as special food to be supplied for the festival days.¹

Another inscription registers a gift of twilight lamp by a lady for which she gave 12 sheep for supply of ghee.²

Another inscription registers gift of 33 sheeps for the supply of ghee for burning a perpetual lamp.³

Another inscription registers gift of 4 Kasu for feeding Srivaishnavas on the new moon days in the matta attached to the temple by a priest.⁴

Another inscription records certain historical events that occurred at that time. It says that the King Vira Narasimha deva heard that the Chola emperor was captured by Kopperunjinga at Sendamangalam. He vowed to vindicate his title. He therefore started from Dorasamudra uproute Makara kingdom seized the chief with its treasures and ordered his two generals to continue the campaign. The general destroyed two vilages where Kopperunjinga was staying. They proceeded further worshipped the God at Ponnambalam and encamped at Thirupapuliur. The Hoysala army then marched on and reached Sendamangalam and forced the Kopperunjinga to release the Chola emperor. Kopperunjinga was frightened and he released the Chola emperor who was accompanied with the army to his dominion.⁵

Another inscription records an agreement by the Tanattar of the Devanayaga temple that the temple parasivas should observe the same type of custom prevailing in Pandi mandalam, Chola mandalam, Makara mandalam, Naduvil mandalam and that new customs should not be followed.⁶

¹ 136 ARIE 1902

² 138 ARIE 1902

³ 139 ARIE 1902

⁴ 140 ARIE 1902

⁵ 142 ARIE 1902

⁶ 1412 ARIE 1902

Another inscription records gift of land for burning 12 lamps before the deity. ⁷

An inscription records an order of the King granting a village to the temple.⁸

Another inscription records gift of 12 sheep for burning a twilight lamp in the temple.⁹

Another inscription records gift of 33 cows for lighting a perpetual lamp in the temple.¹⁰

Another inscription records gift of 4 cows for lighting a twilight lamp in the temple.¹¹

Another inscription records a gift of 25 Kasus by a person for lighting a lamp in the temple. ¹²

Yet another inscription records gift of 32 cows for a perpetual lamp and mentions a liquidity measure called Tara nali. ¹³

Another inscription records a gift of 4.25 Kasus by a lady for providing offerings to the God during the 8th day of the festival to the temple. ¹⁴

Another inscription records an agreement made by the Uravar of Gangaikonda Cholapperalam and Sundarapandyaperala to give a specified quantity of salt to the temple.¹⁵

Another inscription records the royal orders issued to the trustees of the temple remitting the taxes of the five villages given to the temple.¹⁶

Another inscription records gift of land for maintaining 40 twilight lamps in the temple.¹⁷

⁷ 143 ARIE 190-2

⁸ 85 ARIE 1943-44

⁹ 87 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁰ 88 ARIE 1943-44

¹¹ 92 ARIE 1943-44

¹² 87 ARIE 1943-44

¹³ 89 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁴ 97 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁵ 104 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁶ 100 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁷ 101 ARIE 1943-44

Another inscription records an order issued remitting the taxes on the land given for the flower garden.¹⁸

Another inscription records an order communicated to the trustees of the temple granting lands and a garden free of taxes for meeting the expenses in taking the God for the sacred bath to the sea in the month of Masi and for providing offerings while thereafter in the garden at Manalpattu .¹⁹

Another inscription records the gift of land by purchase to the God Mahavishnu who was pleased to stand at Thiruvahindrapuram by Lokiyamadeva probably queen of Rajadhiraja I.²⁰

Another inscription registers a gift of a necklace made of gold of 8.25 mari weighing 5 kalanju, 2 manjadis and 2 ma, a kalam made of brass and two cows for milk offering to the God at Thiruvahindrapuram by an oil merchant.²¹

Another inscription records the gift of 1500 kasus for burning a perpetual lamp.²²

Another inscription records the gift of land for feeding the ascetics in the Narayana Anubhava Sanyasin matta at Thiruvahindrapuram.²³

Another inscription records a tax free grant of land for worship and offerings to the God Deivanayakan on the occasion of the festival in the month of Vaikasi.²⁴

Another inscription records the gift of the village of Adur made tax free for offerings on the occasion of the service in the name of the King.²⁵

Yet another inscription records the gift of land for a festival named after the King to God Deivanayakan.²⁶

Another inscription on the southern wall of the Antarala in Devanatha Swami temple records the gift of land by purchase

¹⁸ 105 ARIE 1943-44

¹⁹ 93 ARIE 1943-44

²⁰ 253 ARIE 1955-56

²¹ 245 ARIE 1955-56

²² 244 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²³ 253 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²⁴ 247 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²⁵ 250 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²⁶ 248 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

to God Mahavishnu who was pleased to stand at Thiruvahindrappuram by Trailokyamadevi. ²⁷

Yet another inscription in the southern wall of the first prakara of Devanatha Swami temple relating to the period of the Pandya King Tribhuvana Chakravartin Konerinmaikondan records the gift of an entire village of Maligaipattukkaruppadi made tax free to the image of Perumal in the temple by one Sundarapandyan. ²⁸

Another inscription relating to the period of the Pandyan King Maravarman Virapandyan registers the sale of land in the abovesaid village to the temple for 1300 Anradunarkasu. The land is said to have been inherited as Sthridhana. ²⁹

The same person has sold some other land also in other villages to the temple as Tirunamattukkani. ³⁰

Yet another inscription relating to the Chola King Sundarapandya Deva registers the document given by a person to the temple authorities in connection with the gift of land in Pulali, a hamlet of Solakulavalli Nallur as Tirunamattukkani the God Deivanayakan. ³¹

Another inscription on the wall to the side of the steps leading to the river records that construction of steps by one Venkasi Amman, mother of Krishnappa Nayaka. There is also a Telugu version of the same record engraved nearby. ³²

Hymnology:

Tirumangai Alwar is the only Alwar who has visited this place and sung in praise of the Lord here. He has composed 10 pasurams. One amongst which viz. 3-1-3 from Peria Tirumozhi is given below with its meaning.

²⁷ 243 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²⁸ 246 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

²⁹ 249 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

³⁰ 252 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

³¹ 255 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

³² 257 ARIE 1955-56 Appendix B

Poem:

வையமேழும் உண்டு ஆலிலை வைகிய மாயவன்
 அடியவர்க்கு
 மெய்யனாகிய தெய்வநாயகனிடம் மெய்தரு
 மரைச்சாரல்
 மொய்கொள் மாசதவி செண்பகம் முயங்கிய
 முல்லையங்கொடியாட
 செய்ய தாமரைச் செழும்பணை திகழ்தரு
 திருவயிந்திரபுரமே

Meaning:

The place Where Deivanayaka Perumal Who during the Pralaya kept the worlds safe inside Him and slept calmly on a banyan leaf; and Who definitely appears before His sincere devotees, lives - Is Thiru Ayinthirapuram Which is near a mountain having the same dark colour as the Perumal and Where the jasmine creepers along with the Shenbagam tree move gently in the breeze and Where the fields are full of lotus flowers.

**Divyakavi Pillai Perumal Iyengar's 108
 Tirupathi Andaadhi:**

Poem:

அன்பணிந்த சிந்தையராய் ஆயந்த மலர்தூவி
 முன் பணிந்து நீர் எமக்கு மூர்த்தியரே-யென்பர்
 எமை இந்திர புரத்தார்க்கு இன் தொண்டரானார்
 தமை இந்திர புரத்தார் தாம்.

Meaning:

In the times to come, the faithful devotees of the Deivanayaka Perumal of Thiruvahindrapuram will be honoured by the Devas themselves by showering flower petals. They will welcome them and treat them as their guests and they will pay obeisance to such devotees.

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